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BROWN IN CRISIS

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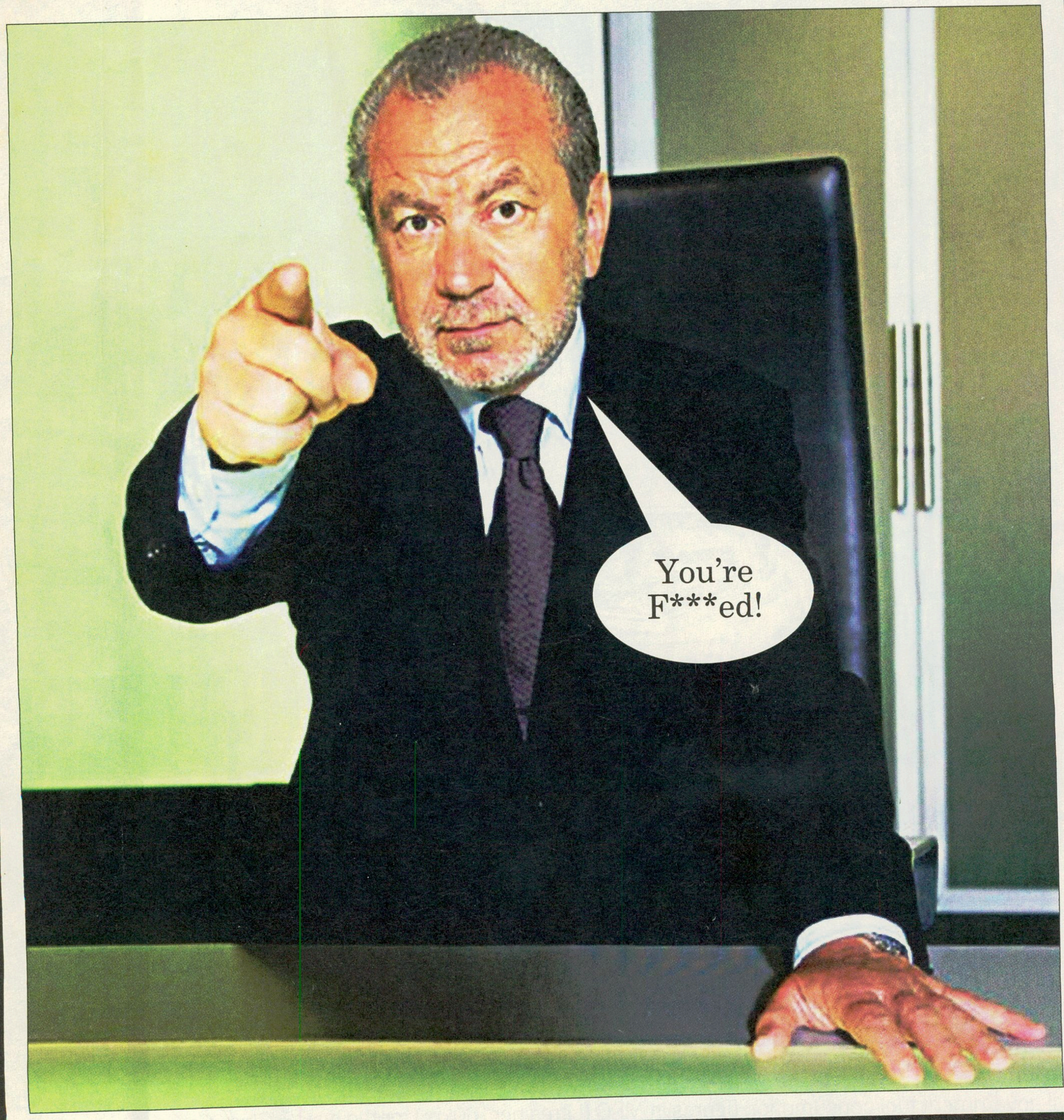

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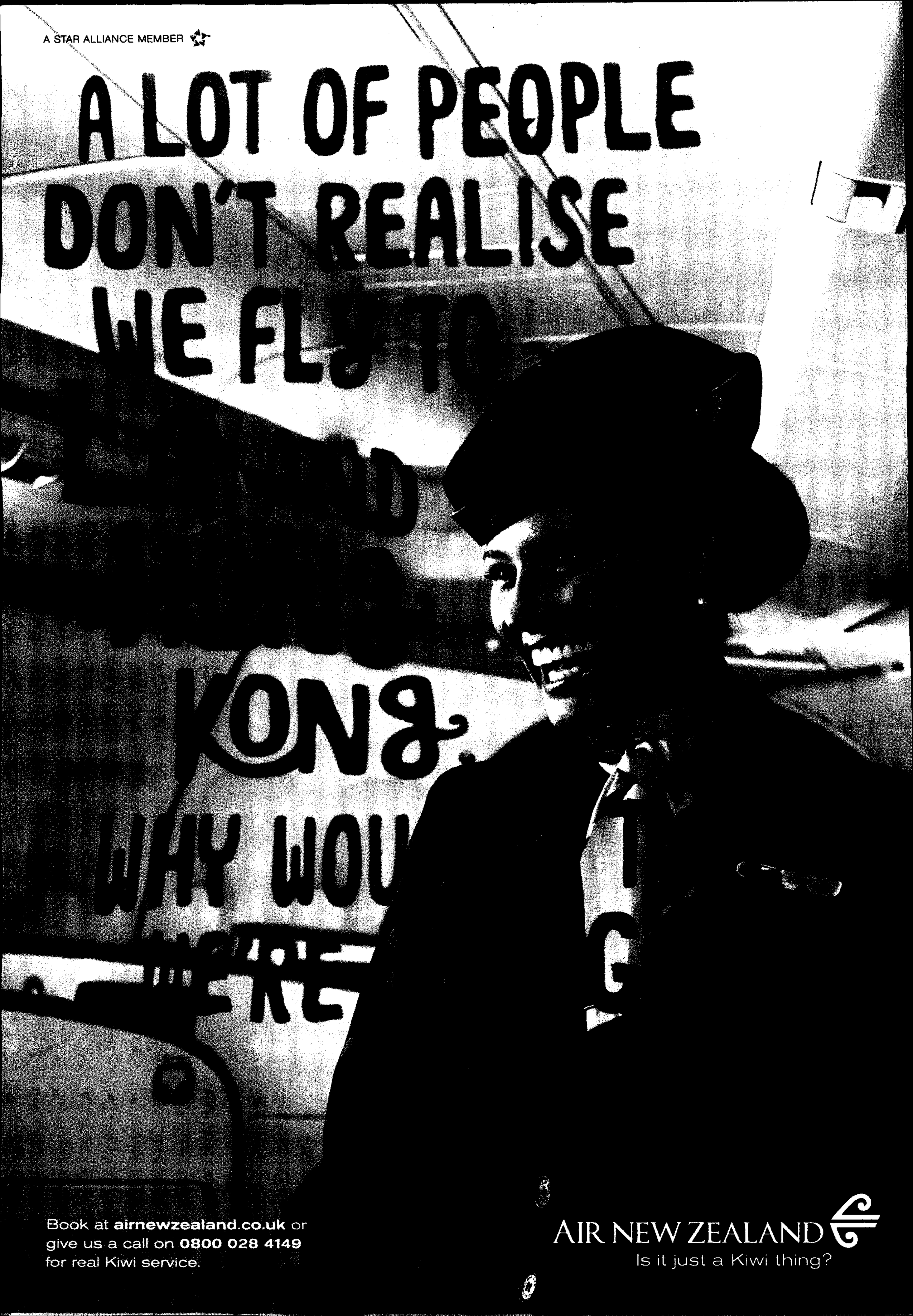

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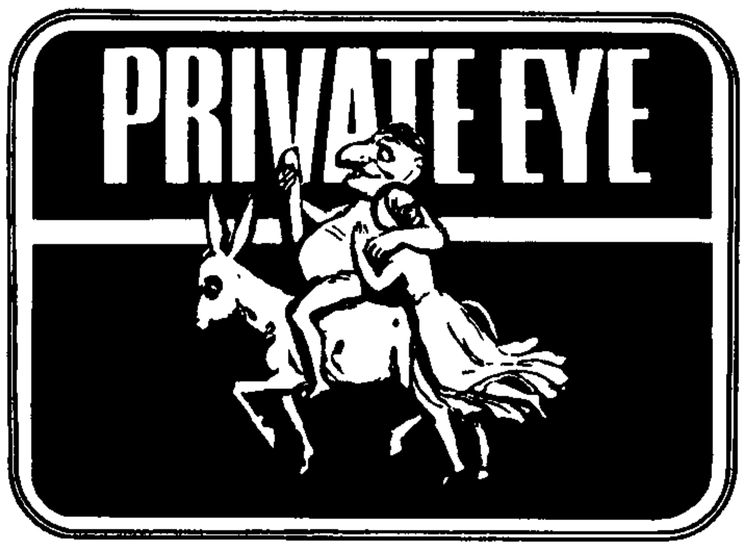

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THE BRONS SHIRTS

ACCORDING to Nick Griffin, the election of two BNP members to the European parliament shows that "the mettle of the men and women... who endured the Blitz and who stormed the beaches of Normandy is still alive".

But why, in his lengthy statement on the BNP website this Monday, does he never once mention the name of the other successful candidate, Andrew Brons? Perhaps because it is already dawning on Griffin that his Euro-colleague promises to be a continual embarrassment, especially on the subject of Nazism.

Had Brons been around during the Blitz he'd probably have been yelling "Bring it on!" As we first reported in 1973 (*Eye* 310), he cut his political teeth back in the Sixties in the National Socialist Movement, whose members were best known for strutting about in mock-SS uniforms and firebombing synagogues. He was the pet pupil of Britain's best-known Nazis, Colin Jordan and John Tyndall, who shared Brons's penchant for fancy dress.

After following Tyndall into the National Front and becoming its parliamentary candidate in Harrogate, Brons had some difficulty in interesting the genteel, all-white electorate in his rants about "the immigration problem". So, as we noted in 1974 (*Eye* 318), he resorted instead to "muttering dark threats and imprecations against the all-powerful 'Jewish bankers'." A decade later, he and an NF colleague scared several old ladies out of their wits by shouting "Death to Jews!" while selling party newspapers in Leeds city centre. When asked to desist by PC John Raj, Brons replied: "I am aware of my legal rights. Inferior beings like you probably do not appreciate the principle of free speech." He was fined £50 for insulting words and behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace.

Now, a mere 36 years after we first introduced readers to his charms, Brons has at last won an election. As he declared in his victory speech: "Despite the lies, despite the money, despite the misrepresentation, we've been able to win through." You said it!

EDITORIAL
6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN.
Tel: 020 7437 4017. Fax: 020 7437 0705.
Email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk
Website: www.private-eye.co.uk

PRIVATE EYE SUBSCRIPTIONS/SALES
PO Box 326, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8FA.
Subscription enquiries: 01795 414 871
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ABC

NUMBER CRUNCHING

1.3% Rise in BNP vote in 2009 Euro elections

3.9% Rise in BNP vote in 2004 Euro elections

QUOTE OF THE YEAR

"New rules being introduced from July will make the European parliament better than the Italian parliament but leave us a long way behind practices in the House of Commons."

– Lib Dem MEP Chris Davies on expense-fiddling in Brussels, February 2009

GLENYS SIGNS IN

AS Glenys Kinnock becomes Europe minister and joins her husband in the Lords, it's worth recalling that she too was caught up in an expenses scandal in 2004.

MEP Hans-Peter Martin claimed to have caught 194 colleagues milking the European parliament's "Sign In and Sod Off" (SISO) attendance allowance. Mrs Kinnock was among those MEPs whom Martin, an Austrian former journalist, found and filmed leaving the building just moments after they had signed in for the day to qualify for their £175-a-day allowance, in addition to their £70,000 salaries as MEPs.

The parliament's president Pat Cox found "zero evidence of wrongdoing" as the rules allowed MEPs to SISO as much as they liked. However, the future baroness's response to the press at the time sounds very familiar by now. "She's broken no rules and got nothing to hide," her office told the media.

TELEGRAPH

NUMBER CRUNCHING

5% Daily circulation increase for the Telegraph following its revelations of MPs ripping off the taxpayer

0% Tax the Telegraph's Brecqhou-inhabiting owners, the Barclay brothers, pay on what they earn from the paper

DONOR RESUSCITATE

WHILE David Cameron is attracting more big-money supporters, Labour's strategy of seeking "high value" donors is now relying on, er, dead people.

Unions and smaller donors kept up their financial support, but Labour received only six cash donations from individuals worth more than £10,000, and four of these were bequests. The only living rich men still supporting Labour are computer millionaire Joe Hemani and Scottish refrigeration magnate William Haughey.

Labour also got more money from beyond the grave than from its rich supporters this year. Labour's millionaires donated £63,200, but the party inherited £102,116 from deceased party members.

VILLAGE PEOPLE

AN ingenious idea has reached the *Eye*, offering a solution to two government headaches at once: MPs' second homes and the Olympic village white elephant.

Eye reader Bryn Glower writes to point out that after the 2012 Games, the nation will be left with "large and already well-secured estates of quite smart apartments built for the athletes" in east London, which could be offered to MPs during the parliamentary week. Shuttle buses to Westminster could be laid on and living side by side with the planned social housing might even be informative for them.

The £1.1bn village was nationalised in May, as Olympic chiefs drew out another £650m from the contingency pot, after finally giving up on attracting a private sector developer in the midst of the credit crunch.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

4 Peers in cabinet of Sir Alec Douglas-Home, former 14th Earl of Home, 1963-64

7 Peers attending cabinet of Gordon Brown, 2009

BROWN SAUCE

"To be honest, when I look at this expenses crisis I remember the words of my father and I remember what he told me: always be honest.

... Do you acknowledge today that you wanted to sack your Chancellor and were simply unable to do so?

No, no.

– Extract from the transcript of Gordon Brown's press conference on reshuffle, 5 June

Curse Of Gnome

MICHAEL NAPIER, former Law Society president, last week resigned from the Legal Services Board after failing in the appeal court to stop the *Eye* revealing that he had been found "guilty" and reprimanded by his professional body for breaching conflict of interest rules.

The appeal judges described Napier's attempts to stretch the law to protect his reputation as "singularly unattractive". Though his law firm, Irwin Mitchell, tried to put its own spin on the outcome, it was never, as some newspapers wrote, about being able to report confidential details of investigations. Rather, despite pages of convoluted legal argument from Carter Fuck and Napier's QC James Price, the case boiled down to a simple point: was someone who had complained about a solicitor obliged to keep the result confidential? The judges' ruling was a resounding No.

Napier had also wanted to keep secret the fact that he and Irwin Mitchell were the subject of the report in which the ombudsman made trenchant criticisms of the way the Law Society had investigated its former president and his firm.

Announcing his resignation, Napier, still the government's pro bono envoy, said: "Recent press coverage about a long running complaint against me and my firm concerning disputed allegations, to be reinvestigated by the SRA, mean that I will no longer be able to give the time and attention required to be an effective board member of the LSB."

Napier has known of the ombudsman's demand for a new inquiry since last December and the details of the scope of the new investigation since March. (The finding of a conflict of interest stands: it is the impact and circumstances surrounding the conflict that is being reinvestigated.)

Instead of wasting £350,000 instructing Carter Fuck to gag the *Eye*, perhaps he should have taken the opportunity offered by us to comment on the finding of the ombudsman's report, and the case of his former client Michael Ford. It is the extraordinary measures he adopted to keep matters secret which have generated the criticism and publicity which called into question his role as a regulator of the profession.

As the appeal judges reminded him, the Law Society was there to regulate the profession and maintain public confidence. "It was not to protect the reputations of solicitors against whom adverse findings are made."

● *Exxon and the lawyer: An explosive tale,* p. 28, 29

EDS YOU LOSE

THE murder of French students Laurent Bonomo and Gabriel Ferez in New Cross, south-east London, last year, attributable to serious failures in the probation service, was the horrific culmination of a classic New Labour public service disaster.

Short of money, probation officers were left with unmanageable workloads, while coordination among different arms of the justice system was dysfunctional at best. According to the National Association of Probation Officers' assistant general secretary Harry Fletcher, a functioning IT system might have prevented the lapse that saw one of the murderers free when he should have been remanded. So why no money, and why no decent IT system?

According to a recent National Audit Office report, a 2004 initiative to introduce a single offender management system, known as C-nomis, was "expensive and ultimately unsuccessful". Millions were wasted and an adequate system is still not in place.

C-nomis got off to the worst possible start when, instead of looking for the best firm, the Home Office simply extended a contract with – who else? – the *Eye*'s old friends at EDS, an all too familiar feature of botched IT deals.

Street Of Shame

SO sudden was James Purnell's resignation last Thursday night that Downing Street itself was only notified at 9.55pm, and BBC1's Ten O'Clock news was forced to segue into a live report directly from a lead item which opened: "Tonight, more ministers have come out in support of Gordon Brown."

Two news organisations, however, were well ahead of the curve: the *Times*, which splashed with the full text of his letter to Gordon Brown complete with letterhead, and the *Sun*, with a memorable front-page headline "I Quit, Now You Quit." By an astonishing coincidence, Purnell's girlfriend Sophie Sutcliffe is a corporate affairs executive for News International, publisher of the *Times* and the *Sun*.

As it happens, Purnell had leaked a copy of his resignation letter to the *Guardian* as well as the two Murdoch papers. However, while Sky News leapt at the opportunity to promote its sister newspapers, wheeling on a succession of Murdoch hacks and showing repeated images of the *Sun* and *Times* front pages, no such hospitality was extended to the *Grauniad* or its luckless hacks.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"In Polly's Last Chance Saloon, there's always time for one more drink." – *Private Eye*, 29 May, noting Polly Toynbee's endless willingness to give Labour a last chance.

"Labour's last chance: oust Brown, then bring in PR." – Polly Toynbee, *Guardian*, 30 May.

"SURELY Labour MPs have grasped the essential message of the expenses scandal – that the public is utterly fed up with politicians who seem to be actuated by their financial circumstances," chuntered *Telegraph* columnist and part-time mayor Boris Johnson this week.

"Now is the moment for all the guilty men and women who claimed for plasma TVs and bath plugs and Peperamis to show that they are willing to put the interests of the country first, jettison Gordon, and have an election."

And what of the guilty man who, as his own paper revealed a few days earlier, claimed the maximum second home allowance during his final year as an MP, despite pulling in around £400,000 in outside earnings on top of his parliamentary salary, and who attempted to claim back the £16.50 cost of a wreath he laid at a Remembrance Sunday commemoration?

Boris – for it was he – uttered not a word on the topic in his *Telegraph* column. But he did make his feelings on the matter very clear in a "furious" phone call to editor Will Lewis the afternoon before the revelations appeared. No doubt this had no effect on the paper's presentation of the story the following morning – a tiny piece tucked away at the bottom of the ninth and final page of the paper's coverage on day 27 of its expenses investigation.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Another disadvantage of being a professional writer is that your life is just scribble, scribble, scribble, and you run out of subjects. Not so for the Dowager Duchess. She has crammed in a great deal of life, and only started to write about it publicly when over 60.

This gives her a great store of examples, and a certain authority. Who else could write so confidently about tiaras and how they were worn before the war?" – **Charles Moore** on Deborah Devonshire, *Daily Telegraph*

"Thingummy's certainly made a name for himself"

LONDON'S *Evening Standard* had some top tips for the top on the day of Gordon Brown's reshuffle.

Angela Smith, MP for Basildon, was "widely expected to get a big promotion, leap-frogging junior ministerial ranks to be made a minister of state in a high-profile role"; "feisty media performer" Margaret Beckett would once again become a full member of cabinet, and Caroline Flint was poised to be "rewarded with a new post after she became the first minister to come out and defend Gordon Brown".

By 6pm, as commuters opened their papers, Smith remained on the backbenches, Beckett had left the government and Flint had resigned with a blistering attack on the prime minister.

"THIS is a major scandal, by any standards." Thus the Somerset sage William Rees-Mogg, whose Catholic conscience is appalled by the revelations about MPs' expenses. He argues that "the House of Lords will now need to revise its own system of allowances".

However, he omits to mention that one of the upper house's highest claimers for overnight expenses, which imply that the claimant has been staying in London five nights a week in order to attend to Lords business, is none other than Lord Rees-Mogg. He has not spoken in the House for 18 months and is virtually invisible at Westminster, but presumably he pops in briefly after lunch to get ticked off the register before writing another magisterial column deploring the behaviour of MPs who claim every expense they can, whether justified or not.

THERE was just one question on the lips of pop fans following the MTV Movie Awards: did it come as a complete surprise to rapper Eminem when Sacha Baron Cohen landed arse first on him dressed as an angel... or might the complex and potentially dangerous high-wire stunt performed above notoriously litigious figures have been a set-up?

Well, yes, it was staged and rehearsed, as the event's scriptwriter confirmed within 24 hours.

Cometh the hour, cometh the man: it was time for showbiz super-sleuth Gordon Smart to give his opinion. "I'm still not convinced," declared the hapless *Sun* hack. "A source in Mr Mathers' camp told me, 'The fact that his bare buttocks would be pressed in his face was never mentioned. When Eminem stormed out he wasn't acting. He was livid'."

Meanwhile Eminem (aka Slim Shady, aka Marshall Mathers, as any *Eye* reader kno) was busy telling the US hip-hop website RapRadar.com how "thrilled" he was by the stunt: "After the ceremony I went back to my hotel and laughed uncontrollably for about three hours."

How did the *Sun* react to this? It, er, ignored it, with Smart instead bashing out half a page on "Why Sacha's our greatest comedian". "Eminem recoiling in horror will go down in comedy legend," he reminisced.

REDDER faces than usual at Canary Wharf. Failed *Apprentice* Debra Barr might not work for Sir Alan, but she does, for now at least, still work for Trinity Mirror who naturally expected an exclusive sit-down with their senior media saleswoman. Alas, no.

"I will only talk to Richard Wallace and Tina Weaver," Debra snootily told both news desks, refusing to deal with anyone below the rank of editor. Unsurprisingly, the editors of the *Daily* and *Sunday Mirror* declined to whip out their notebooks and the pisspoor interview went, instead, to the *Daily Telegraph*.

We are sure the spat has nothing whatsoever to do with the fact that the *Sunday Mirror* – despite desperate pleas from HR – ran a story last week revealing that the hatchet-faced Debra cheated before her shopping-channel challenge by secretly phoning her parents, in contravention of the rules. There was then a rush of calls to the channel's 0871 purchase-line ordering her neck-warming "polopanchos", at least one of which came from her parents' phone number. "No one could quite believe Debra's brass neck," a source at the show commented. Her colleagues at Trinity Mirror, by contrast, now find it all too believable.

THE *Independent's* City section is always hungry for tales of boardroom greed. "Network Rail chiefs are under pressure to forgo bonuses after rail regulators said the company failed to meet some performance targets," it reported on 4 June.

A week earlier, it drew attention to similar stories at Shell ("angry investors are demanding that Shell pays back millions of pounds of bonuses set to be awarded to the most senior executives") and BT, where one executive had received a £1.6m pay-off after overseeing a loss-making division.

During the same period, the share option scheme for senior executives at another multinational, International News & Media, was singled out by RiskMetrics, the financial world's biggest proxy advisory firm, as "not in line with best practice" and "inappropriate". Happily, this naming and shaming of its parent company has yet to catch the attention of the censorious *Indie*.

"FLOORED boards", boomed a full-page feature in the Financial Times last week, revealing that "Europe's biggest investors are growing more vocal in their objections to lavish rewards granted to directors in the absence of *strong performance* tests."

Nowhere in the 2,000-word article was there a mention of one firm that, as the *Eye* reported, has infuriated investors by granting directors big bonuses without strong performance tests. Step forward *FT* owner Pearson, whose remuneration report was rejected by a whopping 33 percent of shareholders last month.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"This week a special meeting at the Royal Geographical Society headquarters in Kensington Gore, London, generated enough heat to melt an iceberg. It was attended by a host of stellar names such as Sir Ranulph Fiennes."
– *Times, 20 May*

"Sir Ranulph Fiennes has become the oldest Briton to climb Everest. The baronet, whose full name is Ranulph Twisleton-Wykeham-Fiennes, completed his third assault on the summit at 1am BST yesterday… the record-breaker had begun yet another assault on the mountain three weeks ago."
– *Times, 22 May*

ROLLING DACRES

EXECUTIVES at the *Daily Mail* have some sympathy for cabinet ministers: they too have a dithering, ineffectual leader in the death throes of his career who sulks in his bunker and stubbornly refuses to make room for a successor.

It's well known that Gordon Brown and Paul Dacre admire each other. What has astounded observers on both teams is how closely they are mirroring one another's behaviour in the handling of their respective crises. Brown won't step aside and Dacre, having steadfastly refused to take on a "sixth floor" hands-off role, is now digging his heels in over a replacement for his long-serving (and long-suffering) deputy, Alistair Sinclair.

Jon Steafel, the joint deputy editor, should have taken over automatically but in the absence of any endorsement by Dacre rumour spread that an alternative was being sought. As if to confirm it, Dacre wouldn't let Steafel move into Alistair's office which the editor, like a grieving parent, refused to allow anyone to touch.

And, observers noted, even by Dacre's potty-mouth standards Steafel was subjected to exceptionally corrosive abuse, simply because he was a daily reminder to Dacre of what has become known as "Alistairgate".

The saga started when Sinclair, keen to retire last year to study for a degree and do some travelling, made it plain he would only stay on as editor. When Dacre told him again last month that he was going nowhere, Sinclair left. Six weeks on, Dacre still hadn't named a successor. None of the candidates seemed to fit the bill: Steafel was too newsy, Martin Clarke was a loose cannon, Ted Verity was too inexperienced and Veronica Wadley (no matter what the *Grauniad* says) wasn't a serious contender.

Then, all of a sudden last Friday afternoon, while Gordon was rearranging his Cabinet, Dacre announced his own reshuffle – Jon Steafel as deputy, with Paul Carter and Ted Verity as joint associate editors. Building maintenance swung into action to remove the last of Alistair Sinclair's belongings and on Monday this week Steafel was officially installed.

It remains to be seen how Dacre will treat his new lieutenant, but early indications are not good. Dacre went berserk when Steafel changed last Friday's first edition splash from the French student murders to the shock resignation of Cabinet minister James Purnell. The man who once famously said the prime minister was "touched with the mantle of greatness" instructed the backbench to change the splash back to the French murders for the later editions.

Ultimately it's irrelevant whom Dacre chooses as his number two: it won't change his belief that no one can edit the *Daily Mail* except him. Therein lies the reason he fails to delegate, encourage or bring staff on – a despotic style of leadership which is infuriating Viscount Rothermere, the paper's owner. A despairing Rothermere confided in a friend last week that he is at a loss to know what to do with the vainglorious editor, who refuses to listen to anyone – least of all the board or Rothermere himself – and is too out-of-touch to steer the Associated titles through stormy economic waters. Like their counterparts in the parliamentary Labour party, *Mail* hacks are left wondering who will have the courage to put their brooding boss out of his misery.

ENVIRONMENTAL warrior James "I would just like my children to be able to eat fish when they grow up" Murdoch likes to give the impression of a down-to-earth bloke, despite being the heir apparent to the Dirty Digger's media empire.

"I've got a Prius that's a couple of years old and it's more efficient than the car I drove before," Murdoch Jnr tells the *Observer* in a feature on ethical living, as he bemoans petrol-guzzlers. "Why do you need to drive a Ferrari to get stuck in a traffic jam anyway? How do people afford these cars? They are like £200,000."

There speaks a man whose daddy has given him and his siblings $100m each!

SO irresistible did the *Sun* find the opening sentence "Crazed North Korean leader Kim Jong-il gobbles LIVE FISH as he plots his rogue country's bid to become a nuclear power" that it could not resist slapping an "Exclusive" banner on Alex Peake's story.

And indeed, Peake's version of the claims of "his former chef Kenji Fujimoto… speaking after fleeing the secretive communist state, which last month carried out a provocative nuclear test" was the only account to appear last Wednesday. Not least because Fujimoto gave his account of Jong-il's snacking habits in a book published in 2003, following his defection from Korea way back in 2001.

"He's trying to tell me something"

BOYLEBALLS

"Susan Boyle: Her sadness – and our shame. *Britain's Got Talent* runner-up Susan Boyle is paying the price for instant fame – and we should look to ourselves for the culprits…

Susan Boyle's Breakdown IN PICS"
– Adjacent articles on telegraph.co.uk, 2 June

"Britain's GUT talent: Spinster Susan, 48, who has tried to jazz herself up with more fashionable clothes, left her house with the zip of her cream trousers undone – showing her bulging tum. Straining buttons on an ill-fitting black blouse exposed yet more flabby flesh, adding up to a fashion disaster."

– Sun, *7 May*

"Jacqui Smith by the day grows more repugnant and nauseating than Susan Boyle's toenails. At least Susan can have her yellow, cracked nails clipped."

– Sun, *9 May*

"Singing sensation Susan Boyle gives a flash of her talent yesterday – as she appears to have forgotten to wear a bra. The *BGT* star's unsightly light pink shirt gaped open when she left home, revealing the side of her breast."

– Sun, *13 May*

"**Support SuBo:** Susan Boyle sang her heart out for us. Now our hearts go out to her as she learns how to cope with fame – and disappointment."

– Sun *editorial, 2 June*

"Susan Boyle has paid a heavy price for fame. She may have become an overnight global singing sensation. But her mental health has suffered a devastating toll… What Susan now needs is a major time out. She's desperate for a break from the all-consuming tide of international attention."

– *Editorial in* Daily Star, *2 June*

"SU-BO'S MENTAL MELTDOWN… RAGING SUSAN'S MEGASTROP: AMAZING ANTICS OF HALF-NAKED LOSER… SUSAN RAN DOWN CORRIDOR IN BRA SHOUTING 'I HATE THIS SHOW'… SUSAN TALKS TO AN INVISIBLE FRIEND… SUSAN: CAN OBAMA FIX HER? YES HE CAN"

– *Headlines in* Daily Star, *1-4 June*

MPs have devised a cunning plan to ensure a fair and thorough audit of their expenses – using the firm that helped them trick the taxpayers in the first place!

The MPs' members estimate committee proposes formally combing through the four years of expenses currently being unofficially audited by the *Telegraph* – Gordon Brown says Labour will rely on this audit to spot MPs' wrongdoing. However, the committee is tipped to choose accountants PricewaterhouseCoopers to carry out the audit, which suggests it doesn't want to look too hard. PwC, after all, has helped run the Senior Salaries Review Body reports into MPs' pay since 2004, and its detailed reports helped whitewash over the dirt in the Additional Costs Allowance (ACA).

"Remuneration consultants" often advise the boards of big firms on their senior pay structure, and somehow these consultants usually say the board is getting the right amount or deserves more. PwC seems to have approached MPs' allowances in just that spirit. As the last *Eye* revealed, PwC helped push through the 2004 rule change that allowed ministers to "flip" their residencies and so claim for expensive London homes, and its enthusiasm for the ACA went further. In its 2004 report, PwC said: "The ACA was, on the whole, not particularly controversial and the amount was said to be about right by the MPs we met." In fact, in that year the parliamentary standards commissioner was calling for "additional controls" over the allowance, and investigative journalist Heather Brooke was beginning to make the freedom of information requests that would finally prise open the can of worms.

By 2007 there were more headline stories critical of the costs. Incredibly, PwC could still see nothing wrong with the expenses, managing to ignore the evidence it had collected. Its own survey of private-sector firms in 2007 found: "Where employees are required to work regularly away from home, it is usual for the employer to provide accommodation, rather than to provide a cash payment which can be used to purchase accommodation of his or her choice." In 2004 it had found that most private employers didn't help employees buy additional houses because they "felt that they should not be seen to be helping an individual to make money from a second home".

Despite this, Brown seems comfortable with PwC's role – and David Cameron is also unlikely to complain. Since 2008, PwC has donated staff time to the Conservatives worth £292,697.

IT WAS only two months ago the Communities and Local Government (CLG) department rejected a key recommendation of an independent review of rural policy it had commissioned from the Lib Dem MP Matthew Taylor.

Taylor wanted to stop well-heeled buyers of holiday homes from driving house prices beyond the reach of locals by trialing new planning rules in national parks that would limit the conversion of homes from full-time to part-time occupation. But the trial would interfere with "the legitimate rights of second home owners", complained the department.

Could this by any chance be the same CLG whose outgoing boss, Hazel Blears, has just paid £13,000 in lieu of the capital gains tax she legitimately avoided by telling the parliamentary authorities her London flat was her second home and HM Revenue and Customs that it was her main home?

"I'll be really annoyed if Gordon Brown goes before we boot him out"

A Pathetic MP Apathetic Voter

HOW SOON WE FORGET

Q: "Why do you think Gordon Brown has been such a disaster as prime minister?"

A: "He hasn't been a disaster. I don't think anyone should underestimate Gordon Brown – he has the strategy and determination to be a great prime minister."

– **James Purnell MP** answers questions from *Independent* readers, 28 January 2008.

"What CAN help Gordon Brown is Gordon Brown himself. He was a good Chancellor, and this newspaper believes he has the makings of a great Prime Minister." – ***The People***, 27 April 2008.

"Change must begin with Gordon Brown's removal as Prime Minister." – ***The People***, 24 May 2009.

"The Chancellor has taken an important step forward. It did, indeed, seem possible to think, watching him yesterday, that Gordon Brown's period as premier would be much more than a small, undistinguished epilogue to the Blair years... If he lives up to the promise, then this most formidable and brilliant politician can turn into a great prime minister." – **Peter Oborne**, *Daily Mail*, 12 May 2007.

"Brown... will be remembered as a fag-end prime minister to Tony Blair's long premiership. He will go knowing that he has been a failure. He will be classified with that tiny group of premiers who were not up to the job." – **Peter Oborne**, *Daily Mail*, 4 June 2009.

IN A spittle-flecked performance on *Newsnight* last week, Roy Hattersley scolded Jeremy Paxman for suggesting that the resignation of several ministers two days before local elections was somehow newsworthy. "That's nonsense, Jeremy," he spluttered. "That is cheap journalism."

Paxman persisted: "How many people resign two days before an election?" Hatterjee had a ready answer. "I can remember Frank Longford resigning two days before the local elections 25 years ago, but journalists were different then... they took things much more seriously."

Twenty-five years ago, in 1984, Lord Longford was 79 years old. He actually resigned in January 1968, rather more than two days before that year's local elections in May. No one has ever accused Hattersley of cheap journalism – his columns are very expensive indeed – but as a peddler of nonsense he remains unrivalled.

SHAUN THE CREEP

AS other ministers flee the sinking ship, Gordon Brown finds himself increasingly reliant on his Northern Ireland secretary, Shaun Woodward.

Indeed, the über-wealthy former Tory, recently fingered for not paying capital gains tax on the sale of his £6m main residence in London while his family lived on a £25m estate in Oxfordshire, was at the prime minister's side in the Commons on the day of Hazel Blears' resignation. Meanwhile shadowy figures have been briefing heavily that Woodward is a man Brown trusts for sound political advice. But is the PM aware of his new best friend's record of loyal support?

Woodward entered parliament in 1997 as the Tory MP for Witney, and found himself in Stephen Dorrell's doomed campaign to succeed John Major as Conservative leader. When it became apparent that Dorrell's other declared supporters (three in total) weren't going to swing it, Woodward persuaded Dorrell to chuck in the towel and quickly signed up to Ken Clarke's campaign, briefing heavily against the rising favourite, William Hague.

On realising that Clarke would not prevail against Hague, Woodward was then part of a small plot to replace Clarke as the One Nation Tory with Michael Heseltine, and he even arranged a secret meeting at his father-in-law Sir Timothy Sainsbury's house to help broker a deal to dislodge his own candidate. On doctor's orders Heseltine, who had had heart trouble, declined; and in the end Woodward's man lost. However, it didn't take long for him then to cosy up to Hague: one MP recalls them sitting in a people carrier together during the ill-fated Woodward-inspired "Listening to Britain" exercise during which Woodward offered to broker a meeting for Hague with the then (and current) Israeli PM, Benjamin Netanyahu. It was also reported at the time that he had offered Hague his Oxfordshire mansion for the annual Tory "retreat". Hague duly made Woodward a shadow minister.

After little more than a year, however, Woodward and Hague fell out over Clause 28 and the promotion of homosexuality, and Woodward decided to try his luck with Tony Blair instead. He switched sides and joined Labour in 1999.

Having consistently briefed friends and the media against the then still popular Blair, not to mention his lovely wife, Woodward was cock-a-hoop at Blair's interest in him, confiding modestly that during their long, late discussions over the timing of his defection, Blair had asked him to stay longer so they could talk more. The diaries of Blair's former spin doctor Lance Price tell a rather different tale; namely that officials had to invent a call to the Irish prime minister at Blair's request to get the star-struck Woodward out of the building on his second visit to Number 10.

Until it became clear that Blair's days were numbered, Woodward enjoyed briefing friends and hacks alike that Tony was the best possible Labour leader, and colleagues recall him spinning relentlessly against Gordon Brown and his circle.

After Blair's demise, however, it didn't take long for Woodward to have a change of heart. On his inexplicable promotion to the cabinet as Northern Ireland secretary, Woodward was at pains to explain to friends how much better things now were under Gordon – what a breath of fresh air he was, and how Tony's government had become stale and tired.

Brown has used his new protégé's talents in developing a "rebuttal" strategy to slow the onslaught of David Cameron's revitalised Conservative party. The results speak for themselves. But as Woodward reaches ever closer to the dizzy heights of power, Brown had better hope his new friend's loyalty ends with him.

ST George's Gay celebrations kicked off all round Newbury as pubs and bars flew the flag in honour of England's patron saint.

Newbury Weekly News

COURTING CAMERON

DAVID CAMERON responded to the expenses scandal by promising his government would give "power to the people". And the latest donors signed up to the Conservative cause, as revealed by the Electoral Commission, tell us what kind of people he means: mostly rich financiers.

Roderick H Brooks, better known as Rory Brooks, runs private equity firm **Mezzanine Management Ltd (MML).** He gave £50,000, on top of a £33,000 donation last year, which buys him a place in the "Leaders Group" who have private meetings with Dave.

In 2007, Mezzanine took over residential care firm "The Regard Partnership", which specialises in looking after people with learning difficulties, in a £120m deal. One month before Brooks' donation, the Regard Partnership's Midsummer special school in Lincolnshire was slammed by Ofsted inspectors, who said the quality of education was "inadequate", the lowest possible mark.

A new backer, **Pierre Rolin**, joined Dave's "Leaders Group" with a £50,000 cheque. He runs property firm **StratREAL**, a big investor in office blocks such as London's massive Heron Tower.

StratREAL has big Middle Eastern backing and investors and is interested in hiring political influencers. Rolin's position at Cameron's dining-room table strengthens the influence of friends of the undemocratic Gulf states around the Tory leader.

The Conservatives also took another £50,000 from **Paul Ruddock** of "short-selling" hedge fund **Lansdowne**, which last month was hoping to make money out of the financial crisis by betting that the Prudential and Legal & General would do badly.

Oddly, the Electoral Commission revealed that one donation, for £21,235.70, came in the shape of a member of staff supplied by **Crombie Concessions** to Conservative Central Office. Have the Tories been given a personal tailor? No. The manufacturer of overcoats for City gents and skinheads is actually owned by **Alan Lewis**, a textile magnate who has a history of funding the Tories in less obvious ways. He was one of the secret lenders to the Tories, his £100,000 loan revealed along with other hidden Conservative and Labour debts in 2006. Lewis also ran the "Millennium Club", organising rich donors for John Major in the 1990s.

HOW PFI WORKS

OCCASIONALLY even government ministers can't stomach the costs of the private finance initiative (PFI).

Two years ago the then transport secretary Ruth Kelly rejected a £1bn PFI scheme for a relief road connecting the M60 near Stockport to the M56 at Manchester airport as too expensive (even though her department had originally wanted it).

Now, after a couple of years' wrangling between local and national government, an alternative has been found. Around three quarters of the road will be built, linking the airport to the A6, at a cost of £290m.

How can the north west's drivers get most of their road for less than a third of the original price? The answer is that the new proposal doesn't involve PFI, so huge payments to the middlemen and financiers don't need to be made.

Despite this, PFI still remains the favoured option for most other government investment such as the £6bn M25 widening and the £45bn programme to rebuild Britain's schools, largely because of its ongoing off-balance sheet allure (see last *Eye*).

One reason PFI is so costly was confirmed in a recent parliamentary answer obtained by Labour's *Alan* Simpson concerning the "building schools for the future" scheme.

Eighteen PFI deals have been signed under the programme, each funded by private companies that have borrowed the money themselves. The interest costs of doing so will duly be passed on to taxpayers as part of the annual PFI charge for each deal. As schools minister Jim Knight told Simpson, the average interest rate paid to fund these schools projects is 5.88 percent. Government borrowing in the form of gilts, by contrast, currently costs around 3.5 percent. Financing costs alone are thus about 60 percent higher on PFI deals than under conventional investment methods – and that's before the fat consultancy, legal and service fees that accompany infinitely more complex private finance contracts.

EDUCASHUN

MORE than two-thirds of the government's privately sponsored academy schools have not received the money pledged to them by their sponsors.

Sixty out of the 85 academies that were funded under the original Academies deal, where sponsors were expected to donate around £2m up front, haven't had the expected funds, according to figures slipped quietly into the House of Commons Library. Sponsors have pledged £142m to support these schools, but almost £60m has not been paid.

Among the funders failing to pay up are some high-profile victims of the recession. The Swindon Academy is expecting £1.5m from Honda and the United Learning Trust. But the figures reveal that it has received nothing at all. Earlier this year, Honda admitted it would make a loss of £320m for 2009.

In Liverpool, the Belvedere academy is expecting £980,000 from its sponsors, HSBC and the Girl's Day School Trust – but it too has not received a penny, according to the figures. In March, HSBC issued a record-breaking £12.5bn cash call and admitted that it had lost £10.7bn on its "catastrophic investment" in the US sub-prime mortgage market.

JCB is the main sponsor of a new academy in Rocester, Staffordshire, and is supposed to come up with £1.75m for the school, set to open in September 2010. At the beginning of this year JCB announced 700 redundancies and said the upturn in orders it had expected "shows no sign of materialising". The money for the school has not materialized yet either.

FURTHER EDUCASHUN

FURTHER proof that academic qualifications – even masters degrees – aren't what they used to be comes from the University of Central Lancashire, currently displaying posters reassuring less-than-brilliant undergraduates that "if you achieve a third-class or unclassified degree it's not the end of the road".

Indeed. There's no need to worry because you can sign up for an MSc/PGDip in Global Management, a course, er, "particularly suited to undergraduates that gain a third-class honours degree or an unclassified degree".

The 15-month course offers to teach international business, corporate governance, human resource management, information systems and new business venture development.

IN a parting blow to university teaching staff, John Denham, outgoing secretary of state for innovation, universities and skills, blamed the rising student drop-out rate on poor "quality of teaching". So it has nothing to do with young people struggling with record levels of student debt, then?

The proportion of full-time first-time degree entrants who don't carry on into their second year is now up to 7.4 percent, according to statistics published the day before the reshuffle that saw Denham become communities secretary. The minister wrote to the Higher Education Funding Council blaming teaching standards, rather than government policies, for the low retention rates.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

HOW many of the UK's laws emanate from Brussels? No one seems terribly sure – least of all Britain's now ex-Europe minister, Caroline Flint.

On a recent edition of the BBC's *Question Time*, Flint insisted that only 9 percent of UK legislation is made in Brussels and Strasbourg. This was not only loudly denied by fellow panellist Nigel Farage, the UKIP leader, but it contradicts what the European parliament's own president, Hans-Gert Pöttering, has told the Irish. "Approximately 75 percent [of new laws] are decided by the parliament which represents member states' governments," he explained to the *Irish Times* at the beginning of June. Since 1979, he said, the parliament has developed into a fully fledged democratic parliament (although its laws are either negotiated in secret or proposed by unelected officials, and processed without open debate, public scrutiny, press freedom or any public records). However, as Herr Pöttering commented: "The European elections are a unique exercise in democracy."

Quite. On a less democratic note, important law-making deals are being negotiated by EU leaders behind the backs of EU taxpayers, according to a member of the EU select committee in the House of Lords.

"Deals are being done between the European Council, European Commission and leading figures in the European parliament at early stages and then legislation goes through without scrutiny," complained Lord Trimble at an Open Europe debate. "Since national parliaments don't get the possibility to scrutinise, things are getting worse."

Lib Dem MEP Baroness Ludford also regretted the lack of transparency and documentation, while Tory MP David Heathcote-Amory warned that the European court of justice was not impartial and that power was being transferred through a succession of treaties and court judges. "What we are living through is an unelected constitutional revolution," he cried.

ENERGY and climate secretary Ed Miliband responded to the row over the construction of coal-fired units at the Kingsnorth power station by saying there would be no new coal power generation without technology to capture the carbon dioxide emitted. What he didn't tell climate activists and other concerned citizens was that they would be paying for it via a scheme cooked up in Brussels!

Although the European Union has a "polluter pays" policy, it seems this doesn't apply to Europe's energy giants. Last month the European commission announced a £160m bung from unspent agricultural funds for carbon capture at Kingsnorth, which is run by E.On (first quarter 2009 profits: up 18 percent to £2.2bn).

And it isn't just E.On that will benefit from taxpayers' cash. Similar subsidies have been pledged to schemes at Hatfield, Longannet and Tilbury, the last of these being owned by German giant RWE, which made what it called "acceptable" profits in the UK in 2007 of £543m.

The commission justifies the subsidies as an economic stimulus. But as green-minded members of the European parliament point out, the cash could have been spent on improving the building stock or public transport, which would have offered more equally shared, environmentally sound and immediate economic benefits. Instead, a few big firms will have money to burn as they test out unproven technology.

EU-phemisms

Apathy

TV

I'm Running Sainsbury's (C4)
The Apprentice (BBC1)

WITH its first big new series of the summer, Channel 4 solves two problems at once. The network has been struggling to attract advertising and also suffering from the fact that its most reliable franchise, *Big Brother*, is looking tired, overshadowed by reality hits on other channels such as ITV1's *Britain's Got Talent* and BBC1's *The Apprentice*.

So along comes **I'm Running Sainsbury's**, a new public participation format that could not be more like *The Apprentice* unless it were fronted by a grumpy cockney knight with the surname Sweet, and which has the additional advantage of serving as an hour-long advertorial for a big player in one of the few sectors that is still buying TV slots: supermarkets.

The shtick will be remarkably familiar to anyone who has watched the Amstrad creator choosing between his psychopathic wannabes. One of the regular challenges to the contestants on that show is to create and market a new product – it was a box of chocolates in the final of *The Apprentice* on Sunday night – and, in Channel 4's copy, a task of that nature constitutes the entire format.

Each week, a lowly employee of Sainsbury's puts forward an idea to increase profitability at the store in these "unprecedented economic times". Justin King, the retailer's chief executive, agrees that, if successful, the new product or practice will be adopted across the country. The laconic commentary – now such a familiar part of the reality genre that you hear it in a Geordie accent even when it isn't spoken in one – promotes the possibility that "shelf-stackers and cleaners" may end up as top business honchos.

The opening contestant was Becky Craze, a young shelf-stacker from Watford branch. Becky's big idea had been to spot a flaw in the store's "feed a family for a fiver" recession-busting offer. All the ingredients for this cheap meal were on sale separately and in different parts of the shop, necessitating a dash around. But what, wondered Becky, if all the things you needed for a single meal were put together in one bag?

Becky seemed rather shy and sweet and completely overawed by being followed around by the cameras, which is a welcome departure from *The Apprentice*, in which the players – the 2009 intake seeming especially deranged – generally give the impression that they would murder

"Great news... I've got you fully booked for the rest of the year"

their mothers to get their names in *Radio Times*.

The cruelty of the process and the gloating editing, though, are entirely borrowed from Sugar's show. Various condescending honchos at Sainsbury's head office – or the Store Support Centre, as it is now Orwellianly called – delight in pointing out the professional necessities that Becky's idea lacks. Soon – in the scene that all reality shows must have: the glum shot – the shelf-stacker is howling uncontrollably on her boyfriend's shoulder as the whole thing goes tinned-pear-shaped. The moral at the end appears to be that strategy is better left to the management, which seems a waste of time except that Sainsbury's has just had an hour of product placement which would have cost millions to buy on the rate-card.

Some consolation for the makers of this drab imitation is that **The Apprentice** itself is looking a bit rocky. First, the final had to be messily moved to a Sunday night because its usual Wednesday slot clashed with ITV1's coverage of the England v Andorra football. Or at least, that was the official reason initially given. Now, though, Beeb conspiracy theorists wonder if the real plan was to get the series finished ahead of Gordon Brown's reshuffle – originally planned for Monday 8 June, the day after the new slot for the final – in which Siralan became Lord Sugar and a business adviser to Brown.

But, as it happened, James Purnell's sudden resignation forced Broon to rotate his cronies on the previous Friday, when lavish trailers for *The Apprentice* final were playing. And, as the Tories gleefully pointed out, BBC rules dictate that no member of the government can host a show that touches on their area of political responsibility.

The obvious precedent is what happened when Melvyn Bragg took a working peerage from the Blair administration in 1998. Lord Barg was instantly dropped from hosting *Start the Week* on the basis that government policy might well come up on a general discussion programme, creating a potential conflict of interest. So *In Our Time* was created for him as a politically safer alternative, Number Ten being unlikely to have much of an opinion on the writings of Plato and the Venerable Bede.

So, if the corporation is consistent and the shadow culture secretary keeps up the attack, the next season of *The Apprentice* will be fronted by Sir Richard Branson while the artist formerly known as Siralan is given the sop of a philosophical series: *Sugar on Seneca*, perhaps.

It's more likely, though, that the BBC will find a way to twist its own rules to keep him, because, if it tries to fire him, he and the format will leg it to commercial television, where, as *I'm Running Sainsbury's* shows, the ethical rules are looser and the programme could probably be called *Work for Lord Sugar at Viglen*.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

YET more garlands for Channel 4's *Dispatches* documentary *Saving Africa's Witch Children*.

Having already been given a Bafta, last week it won a Sandford St Martin award for religious programming and an Amnesty International media award for best documentary. But there was nearly an unseemly row at the Sandford St Martin ceremony, held in Lambeth Palace, when the production team went up to collect the prize and found themselves joined by Aaqil Ahmed, the Muslim who has just been appointed head of religion at the BBC. "What are you doing here?" the cameraman demanded.

A good question. Defending Ahmed's appointment last month, the BBC issued a statement boasting of his recent record as head of religion at Channel 4, "where he was responsible for commissioning... the Bafta-winning *Saving Africa's Witch Children*". No doubt this is what he told the BBC; but it's not true.

The film was commissioned by the editor of *Dispatches*, Kevin Sutcliffe, who then asked Ahmed to look after it. The production company, Oxford Scientific Films, soon began complaining that he was "fucking it up". Sutcliffe had to sideline Ahmed and bring in – at extra expense – a freelance executive producer, Paul Woolwich, to get the film back on course and see it through to air.

When it was shortlisted for a Bafta, neither C4 nor the production company thought to invite him to the ceremony, given that his involvement had been minimal and none too helpful. The day after it won the award, however, Ahmed's PA sent an email to Alice Keens-Soper of Oxford Scientific Films, "to tip you off that Aaqil is a little upset that he didn't get an invite to the awards or mentioned in connection to the film. I know that he won't mention this to you but I have picked up on his attitude to people talking about the Bafta. Is there any chance of a statuette or something to make him happier? Please keep this to ourselves – I don't think I am breaking his trust but I know he's quite taken aback about it." Despite her implication that she was acting on her own initiative, the message was in fact sent at Ahmed's instruction.

His colleagues at C4 were embarrassed and appalled. They were even more horrified a few days later when, without consulting them, C4 boss Julian Bellamy sent a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* celebrating Aaqil Ahmed's new appointment. "It's testimony to the range and quality of Channel 4's religious output that the BBC has appointed our commissioning editor as head of religious programming," he wrote, noting that Ahmed had commissioned "acclaimed documentaries" such as, er, "the Bafta award-winning *Saving Africa's Witch Children*".

Bellamy has since apologised to the *Dispatches* editor for recycling this myth. But to judge by his appearance at Lambeth Palace last week, Ahmed himself remains wholly and shamelessly unabashed. His full title at the BBC is head of religion and ethics. Is there time for a quick refresher course in ethical theory before he finishes his gardening leave?

THE BBC2 series *Mary Queen of Charity Shops* sees Mary Portas, the former creative director of Harvey Nichols, devote five months of her life to revitalising the image of charity shops in the UK.

Some 2.6m people watched last week's opening episode, in which Portas was so disgusted by the quality of donations to a Mind shop in West Wycombe she felt the urge to cart several sacksful 30 miles to the vast Westfield Shopping Centre in west London so that shoppers could gawp at their unsuitability. Later episodes will see her open "Mary's Living and Giving Shop" in Westfield, adjacent – as widespread press coverage has been keen to point out – to the Louis Vuitton store.

Something of which her supporting cast of elderly volunteers may have been unaware is that Portas is also the owner of the "creative communications agency" Yellow Door, which just happens to handle all the PR for… the Westfield Shopping Centre. Producers saw no need to mention this in the programme – but perhaps it has just slipped their minds, it being all of seven months since Yellow Door ran a promotional campaign in the BBC's in-house magazine offering generous discounts to all corporation employees in outlets throughout the vast mall.

NEWS that Jonathan Ross's Radio 2 show was to be pre-recorded "to ensure the programme is watertight in line with compliance" must have come as a disappointment to one of his biggest fans.

A mere five days before the announcement, the admirer in question was quoted thus in the *Observer*: "You have to recognise about Jonathan Ross that to some extent the reason that he is so popular and the reason that he is sufficiently in demand that we pay well for his services is precisely because he's an unpredictable, edgy, entertaining entertainer.

"If we announced in front of every edition… that we could assure the public the programme had been fully complied, and we guaranteed that Jonathan was not going to do anything which was in any way going to be risky or edgy, I think your personal enjoyment of the programme would probably be diminished rather than enhanced."

Who was this happy risk-taker, so out of touch with the prevailing culture at the BBC? Er, director-general Mark Thompson.

DUMB BRITAIN

Celebrity Are You Smarter Than a Ten-Year-Old?, Sky One

Duncan James of the boy band Blue: I'm thinking, age 7 English grammar. What's grammar?

Noel Edmonds: If you need to ask, you might be better with something else.

DJ *(to young Joseph)*: How old are you?

(Joseph is too stunned to reply)

NE: Ten.

DJ: Yeah, obviously.

NE: There's a clue in the title of the show.

NE: Age 9 world geography. Cheryl is in Ethiopia, Kimberley is in Kenya and Sarah is in Sudan. Which girl's in a landlocked country?

DJ: What does "a landlocked country" mean?

NE: I had a feeling you were going to ask that.

Magic 105.4

Presenter: Which two counties fought the Wars of the Roses?

Caller: Was it Kent and Essex?

MELVYN BRAGG interviewed David Attenborough at the Brighton literary festival last month.

"What brought back the BBC in the Sixties almost more than anything," Bragg writes in his *In Our Time* newsletter, "was when he [Attenborough] said that he was told, having appeared on *Zoo Quest*, that he would be given no money for this because the rule was 'staff no fee'. I encountered that as well when I started to introduce programmes while being a producer at the BBC. Staff no fee. It's a good system."

As Bragg explains: "The clear guideline was that if you were in a position to appoint yourself to present a programme then good on you, but this did not lead to you paying yourself for this privilege." Alas, he says, this virtuous approach has now gone the way of the gold standard. Mischievous wage slaves at the Beeb are claiming that Melvyn was clearly referring to Alan "Botney" Yentob, who appointed himself as presenter of *Imagine* and then collected a "bonus" for fronting the show, on top of his salary as a BBC executive? Surely not!

AN UNFORTUNATE example of BBC bias emerged following the resignation of James Purnell.

BBC Breakfast had invited Barry Sheerman MP into the studio to talk about the state of Gordon Brown's leadership. A noted Labour rebel, Sheerman told a riveting story about Number Ten "ringing around my constituency, asking them to discipline me for disloyalty", a potentially interesting story. Sheerman asked, rhetorically: "Where do the boundaries of Number Ten lie?"

"I'm sorry, that's all we have time for," replied the presenter, introducing instead the arch loyalist Douglas Alexander, who proceeded to drive home the official Downing Street line instead.

THERE'S been a development in the long-running saga of BBC Monitoring's legal battle against a former employee in its Central Asian Unit, based in Tashkent (*Eyes passim*).

The employee successfully sued BBC Monitoring in 2008 for wrongful dismissal and for withholding his pension. He was awarded 1m sums in damages (£833), which was reduced on appeal to 50,000 sums (£42).

But questions are being asked about the fairness of the appeal. It appears that a few days after the case ended, the judge who heard the appeal, two lawyers acting for the BBC and the head of the police's investigations bureau were detained by Uzbek national security on suspicion of receiving a $3,000 bribe (£1,850).

SHOWBIZ agent Tony Clayman had a meeting with ITV last week about his client Bradley Walsh. It seems that the former *Coronation Street* actor plans to record a country album and wants a TV show to go with it.

"And would any genuine country stars be involved?" the exec enquired. Tony thought for a moment. "I can get Johnny Cash," he said.

The Zombie Viewing Choice

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Close friends of Mr Brown accuse lobby journalists of being complicit and compliant with the plotters by being ready to air their views without naming them."– *Six O'Clock News, Radio 4, 4 June*

AD NAUSEAM

ON 24 April a website and hotline were launched in the Spanish media to encourage expats to shop benefit cheats living it up on the Costa del Sol.

The initiative was also publicised in Britain. "We are absolutely determined to stop benefit thieves stealing from the British taxpayer," said employment and welfare reform minister Tony McNulty.

Whoops! Six weeks to the day and McNulty was forced to resign from the government amid controversy over his own expenses claims. Doubtless he will recall the slogan of the campaign he fronted: "We're closing in."

PS: The campaign against benefit cheats here, launched last October under the same "We're closing in" strap, has not been repeated since the expenses row broke. Why ever not?

THE *Eye* has long maintained that the Advertising Standards Authority is toothless, with lots of regulatory codes but little power to enforce them. But its current stand-off with Ryanair, the most persistent offender of recent years, makes it a laughing stock.

An investigation by *Marketing* magazine reveals that since April last year, all public complaints about Ryanair ads have been gathering dust. In April 2008, the ASA referred the airline to the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) for continually breaching its rules on misleading advertising. Since then, the ASA has received 121 more complaints about Ryanair. These have merely been forwarded to the OFT, which has done nothing about them.

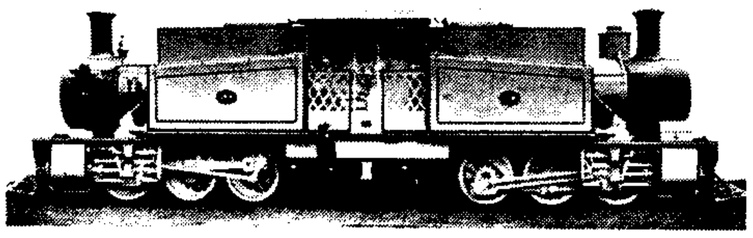
The OFT says the Ryanair investigation is "ongoing", but what sanction it imposes on the airline for years of flouting the rules remains to be seen. In the meantime, it appears that flouting the rules has placed Ryanair above the rules. The company that has long called the ASA "Absolutely Stupid Asses" may have been right.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

CHRISTIAN LACROIX GOES INTO RECEIVERSHIP:
ZIS IS MY 'READY TO WEAR' COLLECTION…
AND ZIS IS MY 'READY TO FOLD' COLLECTION……
GISSA JOB

SIGNAL FAILURES



Branson tickle

WHEN Richard Branson unveiled his scheme to run trains into the 2030s, he received unquestioning coverage in the media. How did Virgin's spin doctors manage that? By only inviting hacks who are awestruck in Beardie's presence and excluding those who ask awkward questions.

Pleading for another 20 years on the west-coast mainline after Virgin's 15-year franchise ends in 2012, Beardie talked of a £1bn investment and raising trains' top speed to 140mph. "Competition on the infrastructure side would be healthy and would get more value out," he said. He also wanted an end to franchises being awarded to the companies that promised the biggest payments to government – "It just does not work," he moaned.

The handpicked hacks duly dashed off breathless pieces about "bolder thinking" and the "overhaul" of franchises… and the public did not get to read that:

In 1997 Beardie promised to have west-coast trains running at 140mph but they're still limited to 125mph, after the Virgin-Railtrack upgrade scheme flopped;

Competition on the infrastructure side was tried by Railtrack in the 1990s. Far from being "healthy", it contributed to accidents that caused deaths and injuries as contractors and Railtrack cut corners. Then Railtrack collapsed leaving its legacy of neglect to its successor, Network Rail. At least NR got "more value out" (saving hundreds of millions of pounds a year) by taking track maintenance in-house;

When Virgin talks of investing, that doesn't necessarily mean spending its own money. "Virgin is investing over £2.8bn in new trains," it claimed (Letters, *Eye* 1005) although Virgin actually leases its new trains, bought by banks for about £1bn.

The biggest culprit for winning franchises by promising unrealistic payments is, er, Richard Branson. He offered to pay more than £1.2bn to government at 1997 prices for the west-coast franchise – which has never stopped receiving subsidy (£162m in 2007-8).

THE Advertising Standards Authority has dealt a minor blow to the rail industry's campaign to wean passengers off ticket offices, so more staff can be sacked (*Eye* 1234).

The ASA told Trainline.com not to repeat TV and poster ads portraying people who queue to buy tickets as sheep, because the ads didn't properly explain the claimed savings available through the website.

By mocking the queues at ticket offices, the ads drew attention to understaffing and other shortcomings in rail ticket sales. Trainline.com says it has sold to "3.3m travellers" in "over 14m transactions" since 1999 – not much to show for a decade's online trading. Rail fares are so complicated many people don't trust themselves to make the right purchase without talking to staff.

Another turn-off is the rail industry's general refusal to allow people to travel with tickets printed at home (common for overseas train travel). Passengers can be clobbered with penalty fares if they travel with only a reference number for valid tickets bought over the internet. So online buyers rely on Royal Mail or pay for a courier to deliver their tickets. Or they may be able to collect their tickets at the station… allowing plenty of time to queue with all the other sheep at ticket windows or machines.

PS: Trainline.com's TV ad also showed sheep piling into a commuter train, but this is very misleading. Every sheep in transit must by law be allowed at least 0.3 to 0.5 square metres of floor, but the Health and Safety Executive told an *Eye* reader last month there are "no regulations which specify a limit" for people in trains. "Responsibility for the day-to-day safety, welfare and convenience of passengers using the railways lies with individual train operating companies." Hence outfits like Southeastern can shorten nine daily Sevenoaks and Ashford commuter trains even though passenger numbers (and fares) are rising.

'Dr B Ching'

MEDICINE BALLS

Pathological Sickness

ON 1 2007 a letter was sent to Dr Martin Morse, medical director of North Bristol Trust (NBT), detailing 11 alleged serious diagnostic errors made by histopathologists at the Bristol Royal Infirmary, resulting in significant patient harm. These cases came to light when slides and samples were subsequently reviewed at NBT.

According to the allegations, one woman (now deceased) was told her breast biopsy was benign but later presented with metastatic cancer, and patients with malignant lymphoma, melanoma (twice) and vulval carcinoma were also initially told they did not have cancer. Conversely two other patients allegedly had treatment for cancer when review of their biopsies found no evidence of it.

Documented errors appeared most likely in patients with rare lung disease. Again, patients have allegedly been told they have cancer when they don't, and vice versa. Another was allegedly told he had tuberculosis when subsequent review found that he didn't.

Interpreting tissue slides is stressful and complex, and some mistakes inevitably happen. The Royal College of Pathologists (RCPath) clearly states that when discrepancies in reporting occur, prompt independent review is required but some of these errors date back to 2000, and when the college was invited to do such a review, it apparently declined as it did not want to get involved in an "internal matter".

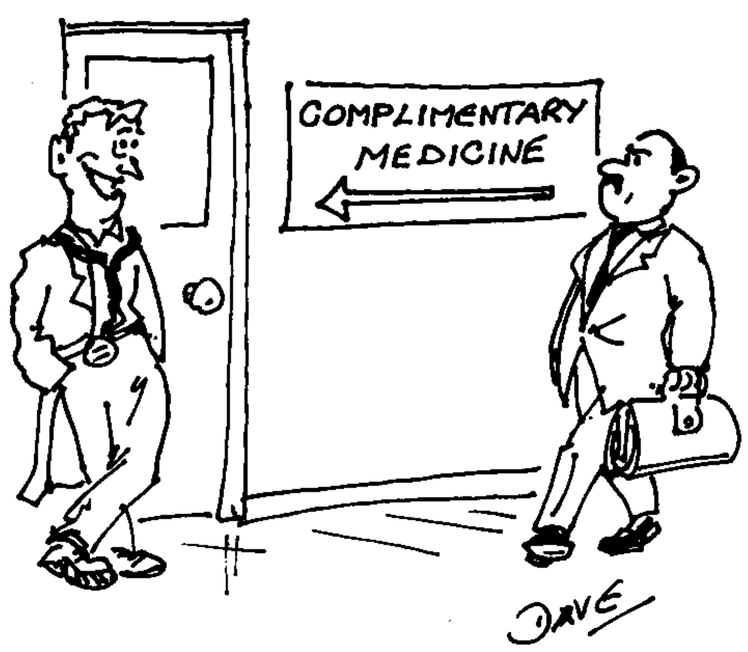
Bristol is blessed with some fine pathologists, including respiratory specialists based at NBT, and if they worked in teams, accepted the same quality control and shared difficult diagnoses, then doubtless some harm to patients could have been prevented or reduced.

Alas, the long-standing rivalry between Bristol hospitals has prevented this from happening. Until July 2008, NBT pathologists claim they were unable to access the slides for their patients who were treated at the BRI, though this has now been resolved. However, slides from other patients who might benefit from the specialist service at NBT are still not being shared. Dr Morse has raised concerns with the Medical Director of University Hospitals Bristol (UHB), Dr Jonathan Sheffield, but – two years after the whistle was blown – an independent external review has not happened. Four additional cases of apparent lung misdiagnosis have now been documented, but Dr Sheffield has stated that there is "no evidence to confirm a significant error rate" in the service.

As well as the RCPath, these concerns have been brought to the attention of the chief executives of both trusts, the medical director of the strategic health authority, the medical director of the Avon Somerset and Wiltshire Cancer Services and the National Clinical Assessment Authority, thus far without satisfactory investigation or resolution.

It seems extraordinary, given what happened previously in Bristol, that UHB staff would not accept they might have a problem in their pathology department and act quickly to get an outside assessment. An urgent external review and the assimilation of pathology services across Bristol into a network that encourages scrutiny and shared expertise is now vital for patient safety. Dr Sheffield and the RCPath have been sent a detailed summary of the alleged misdiagnoses and M.D. has asked Barbara Young at the Care Quality Commission to investigate.

M.D.



"Hey! Nice suit! You're looking great today – you been working out?"

"I can come out to play if you fill in this risk assessment form"

FiT FOR PURPOSE?

OH DEAR. Stalwart outdoor space defenders at Fields in Trust (FiT – formerly the National Playing Fields Association) have sold out after being wooed by Tesco's mighty PR machine.

FiT's "Save a Field" toolkit given to local campaigners highlighted past battles with the UK's largest retailer, which has tried to develop numerous playing fields into giant superstores (and has often succeeded – see *Eyes passim*). "The war with Tesco [was] won by people power and common sense," says the case study of the planning battle in Torrington, Devon. More recently, plans for a Tesco on Sandy Lane playing fields in Dawlish were defeated.

But now that it has been offered the chance to take part in Tesco's faux "community fairs" this summer, FiT has changed its tune, *selling its* credibility for the price of holding stalls at the events. In the latest newsletter to supporters, the association writes that Tesco "takes its responsibility to invest back into the communities it works in seriously. As part of this Tesco are hosting Community Fairs in a number of stores across the country to encourage customers to get more involved in their local community through volunteering. FiT is delighted to be one of the charities Tesco has invited to participate and we're looking forward to meeting our members and hopefully recruiting some new ones!" So that's all right then!

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

A LUTFUR YOUR MONEY

THE LABOUR leader of Tower Hamlets council, Lutfur Rahman, re-elected as leader last month by two votes, has spoken of his multicultural vision for the deprived, racially mixed borough: "One Tower Hamlets".

Just how multi-culti Cllr Rahman's vision is has been demonstrated by his choices for the council's ten £24,000-a-year cabinet positions. Eight of the 10 are Bengali. There is not one white woman and just two white men, one of whom, the well-regarded Josh Peck, has been removed from the powerful finance portfolio to the meaningless deputy leader position. The man now in charge of the £1bn budget is Ohid Ahmed, who struggles to make himself understood in English.

Giving the lie to those who believe that defectors never prosper, Rahman has opened his arms (and the taxpayer's wallet) to former enemies. Six of seven councillors who have crossed to Labour in the last two years now have paid positions. They include five of George Galloway's former Respect/SWP councillors. Two of them, Rania Khan and Oliur Rahman – who both used to tear into Labour in the council chamber – are now in the cabinet, while Khan's mother, Lutfa Begum, is now £13,000-a-year deputy mayor.

Waiseul Islam, who last year tried to make Tower Hamlets taxpayers pay for his trip to the Beijing Olympics, has been handed an extra £6,000 on top of his basic allowance of £10,000 for the specially created role of the borough's "Olympic Ambassador". Fazlul Haque, who does not live full-time in the borough and is nicknamed "the member for Ilford", has been rewarded with a total allowance £15,000 for chairing the audit committee. Meanwhile Rajib Ahmed, once dubbed the "mystery man" of Tower Hamlets after being repeatedly reprimanded for his poor attendance, has been made £18,000-a-year chair of the pensions committee. Mohammed Shahid Ali, who was overheard snoring in one planning meeting, now gets £18,000 as chair of the general purposes committee.

All-in-all, 25 of Tower Hamlets' 33 Labour councillors now have paid positions in addition to their basic allowances. Gracious leader Lutfur, a wealthy lawyer, has taken a £7,000 cut to help pay for these changes, bringing his allowances total down to a mere £32,000. Normally, opposition leaders would be fuming about such largesse, but they've been strangely silent. Unconnected, shurely, to the fact that Tory leader Peter Golds and Respeck's Abjol Miah have both accepted £3,000 rises.

Last week Lutfur furthered the multicultural agenda by moving to oust the borough's respected chief exec, Martin Smith. Smith was told to "consider his future" after the council leader told him he no longer had his confidence. Smith will now go on gardening leave pending a likely bumper pay-off. The interim chief will be Dr Kevan Collins, a former Downing Street education adviser, who is currently the borough's education director. Collins is well-thought-of by many, and ambitious. But he is also gay, and therefore not acceptable to the East London Mosque – which is where the real power lies in "multicultural" Tower Hamlets. A rigorous and fair selection process will now take place… leading to the appointment of a Muslim Bengali.

● TORY Poole borough council in Dorset faces embarrassment after terminating the contract of one Adam Osman, hired on a £65,000, six-month contract to identify cost-saving efficiencies, after it was revealed that he had served a jail sentence for corruption.

As Adam Ozakpinar, Osman was sentenced to two-and-a-half years in 2007 after being caught taking £18,000 bribes in exchange for contracts with, er, the Crown Prosecution Service, where he was head of procurement. Poole's "strategic director", Peter Pawlowski, admitted that no criminal record checks are carried out on consultants. Perhaps it's time they were.

FREER RIDE

FORMER banker Mike Freer, Tory leader of the London borough of Barnet who last year absolved himself of any blame for the council's unfortunate investment of £27m in dodgy Icelandic banks, has been making free with taxpayers' dosh again.

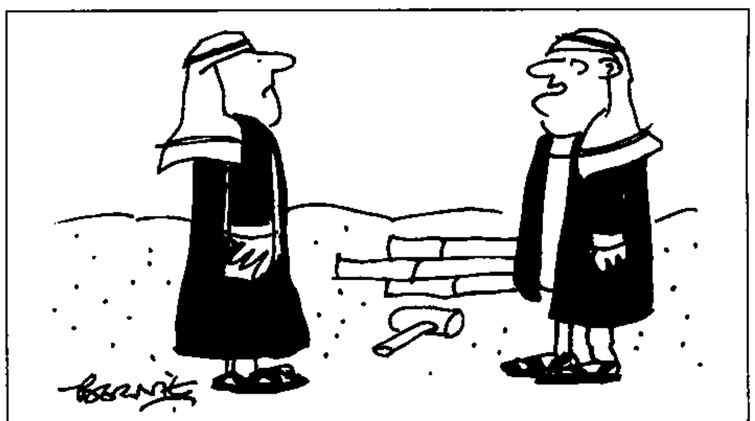
He has stumped up £10,000 of public money so his Tory cabinet colleague Brian Coleman can hire a firm of fancy lawyers to defend himself against a complaint about his behaviour – even though Coleman could have taken free legal advice from a firm nominated by the council's insurers.

Only the best will do for Coleman, so he will have the assistance of Beachcroft LLP, one of Britain's biggest commercial law firms, when he faces the council's standards committee over an email he sent to a local blogger, Roger Tichborne, and copied to Tory councillors.

Tichborne had objected to Cllr Freer describing some of the council's critics as "nutters" and "one-handed bloggers" carrying out "vendettas". Coleman's response was to call Tichborne "an obsessive, poisonous individual and Labour Party member whose blog is full of lies, half-truths and misinformation... the leader of the council is totally right".

Cllr Freer, who will be Tory candidate for Margaret Thatcher's former parliamentary seat of Finchley and Golders Green at the general election, designated the dosh for m'learned friends "urgent" – thereby circumventing awkward questions from the council's overview and scrutiny committee.

Coleman, who became mayor of Barnet last month, was criticised in 2007 for claiming £10,000 in taxi fares as a member of the Greater London Assembly. Last year he slashed his taxi bill to just £8,231 – still almost as much as the other 24 GLA members combined. Good to see in these belt-tightening times that someone is prepared to provide a lead.



"Build whatever you like, Noah, but the Weather Centre says fine and dry..."

● SLEAZE? What sleaze? That was the response of the Tory/Lib-Dem coalition which runs Newcastle-under-Lyme borough council in Staffordshire when it was revealed that it had written off more than £47,000 in unpaid business rates owed by companies linked to the deputy chair of the council's audit committee.

Cllr Peter Whieldon – who resigned in April – was involved with a string of pub and leisure companies that went under owing hundreds of thousands of pounds. But the council refused to believe evidence that he was linked to the firms, which had a total of £47,846 in unpaid business rates written off between March 2004 and March 2008.

Local Labour MP Paul Farrelly raised the scandal in the Commons last year, but still the council denied the evidence, as it did when an outside investigator it had hired reported that the Tory member had indeed failed to declare his business interests fully. The council has yet to explain who ordered the debt to be written off, or why.

NEY SAYING

THE *Eye* can reveal yet another "fixed penalty" triumph for the sticklers at Lambeth council.

Motorcyclist Michael Ney was baffled to receive a "penalty charge notice" (PCN) which claimed he had been riding in a bus lane in the south of Lambeth, where motorbikes were banned, at a time when he had actually been crossing Westminster Bridge in the north of the borough.

Although the PCN stated camera 139 had spotted him, the picture accompanying the notice had "159" on it. He discovered that camera 159 was on Westminster Bridge Road southbound, on a bus lane that motorcyclists are permitted to use. After Lambeth continued to demand payment, Ney went to Insp Knacker alleging attempted fraud. Lambeth's legal head then admitted an "administrative error".

Mr Ney wonders how many unwitting victims of "administrative errors" have helped fill Lambeth's coffers.

CURSE OF GNOME

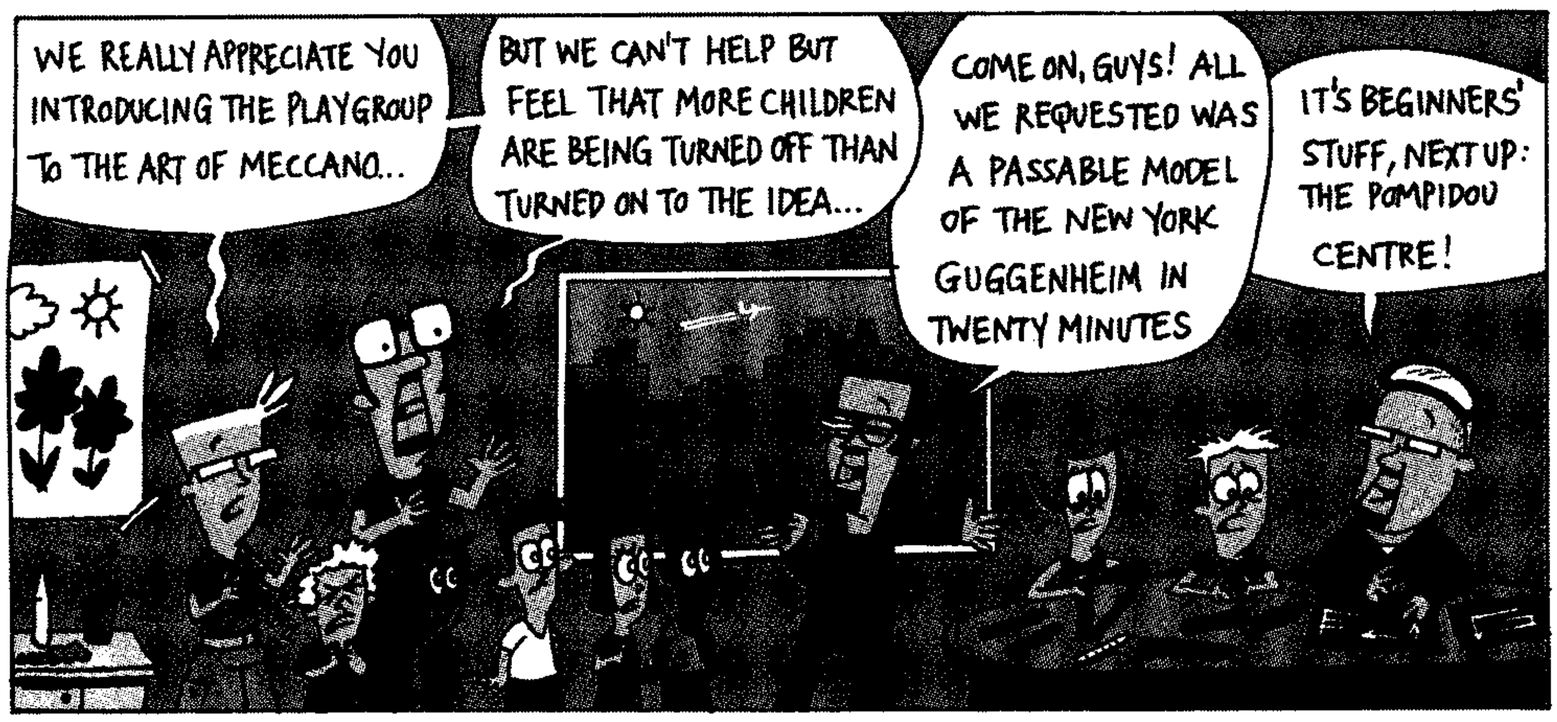
SO. FAREWELL then Paul Lainchbury, Skidrow-on-Sea's absentee Tory councillor (*Eyes passim*), who resigned on the day of last week's local and Euro elections.

After Lainchbury, who had missed every Brighton & Hove council committee meeting and community/resident group for a year, was exposed in the *Eye,* Tory council leader Mary Mears insisted he stay on long enough for Skidrow Tories – who now lose their overall majority – to select the new mayor and cabinet unopposed last month. This meant the ensuing by-election could not be held on the same day as the Euros, prompting a special poll in Goldsmid ward costing an extra £10,000-£20,000. Trebles all round!

● SEVERAL readers appeared to think there was something funny about the names of the Tory candidates for Stratford-upon-Avon at last week's Warwickshire elections: Lynda Organ and Vince Seaman. Whatever could they mean?

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

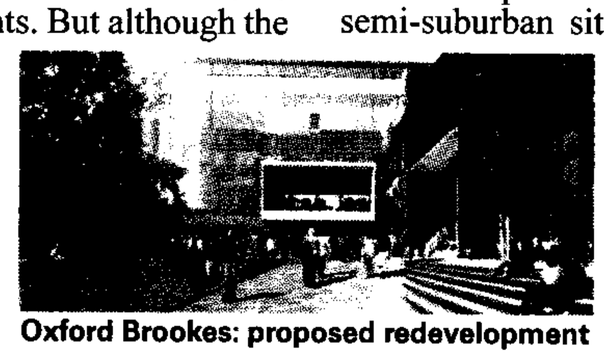

WE REALLY APPRECIATE YOU INTRODUCING THE PLAYGROUP TO THE ART OF MECCANO...
BUT WE CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL THAT MORE CHILDREN ARE BEING TURNED OFF THAN TURNED ON TO THE IDEA...
COME ON, GUYS! ALL WE REQUESTED WAS A PASSABLE MODEL OF THE NEW YORK GUGGENHEIM IN TWENTY MINUTES
IT'S BEGINNERS' STUFF, NEXT UP: THE POMPIDOU CENTRE!

NOOKS and CORNERS

OXFORD has not one but two universities. And if you are driving into the city from London you come to the main campus of Oxford Brookes University first, at the top of Headington Hill.

On one side of the road is Headington Hall, once the seat of the criminal Cap'n Bob Maxwell, and now the administrative centre of the university; on the other is the Gipsy Lane site, the original core of what was once Oxford Polytechnic: largely a dismal collection of 1950s and 1960s blocks designed by the city architect's department.

It is unfair to suggest that Oxford Brookes caters for those who, in the noble tradition of Jeffrey Archer, want to be able to say they were at university in Oxford without having gone to the other, slightly older one. Oxford Brookes has some very good academic departments. But although the vice-chancellor, Professor Janet Beer, denies it has ambitions to continue growing, there is no doubt it wants to raise its profile and continue to attract foreign students.



Oxford Brookes: proposed redevelopment

So a grand £150m plan has been hatched to redevelop "our existing academic space". This means revamping the Gipsy Lane campus to create what the university describes as "a modern gateway for Oxford to complement the historic city centre". This is being achieved by demolishing the old wall that ran along the London road to open out a "public square" beyond which will be a "dynamic new building": a new student centre. This iconic (of course) structure will run almost the length of the site, will rise to seven storeys and its 22,000 square metres of floor space will contain a "new forum", a library, lecture theatre, social activities, catering and pooled teaching. The centrepiece will be a "stunning arrival atrium" to allow Oxford Brookes to be "on display through an energy efficient glass frontage".

This "landmark building", which the university insists "is not about growth and expansion", has been designed by a Winchester-based firm, Design Engine. The principal partner is Richard Rose-Casemore, a former employee of Milord Rogers, who also runs the post-graduate department in the Oxford Brookes School of Built Environment. Usefully, he is also a south-eastern representative for the Commission for the Built Environment (CABE). The firm's website says its work "is always boldly contemporary whilst attaching great importance to the traditional arts of composition and proportion. Working in historic contexts is particularly challenging and rewarding where modern intervention can accentuate the quality of both the old and the new."

The "context" of the new student centre is indeed historic. It is at the top of Headington Hill, overlooking the dreaming spires of Oxford, and is in a conservation area. Immediately adjacent is an area of small houses and terraces whose residents are not enamoured of the idea of a vast seven-storey block – higher than the existing 1960s buildings – looming over ("accentuating"?) their back gardens. Local opposition is dismissed as nimbyism; and Professor Beer claims her university "made an enormous effort to invite the community to comment on and influence our plans on three separate occasions in 2006, 2007 and 2008".

This is hotly denied by the locals. They also point out that the Masterplan for the Headington Campus published in 2007 did not envisage any "dynamic new building" crammed into its centre and that the huge new student centre was only slipped in this year just before the university applied for planning permission. In truth Mr Rose-Casemore's masterpiece represents a monstrous overdevelopment of what is already a cramped semi-suburban site. It is also a rather banal and dated composition of towering rectilinear masses articulated by excessive stretches of glazing.

Discussing the original Oxford Poly complex in his *Oxford: an architectural guide*, Geoffrey Tyack writes that "it is hard to think of a single public building of any distinction in Oxford, outside the University [ie the ancient one], dating from the first three post-war decades: an indictment all the worse for the fact that these decades saw a level of prosperity unmatched in any earlier period... Fortunately, economic recession and public revulsion against the worst architectural excesses intervened before more damage could be done." How sad that, in its ruthless ambition, Oxford Brookes seems determined to maintain that tradition. With luck, public revulsion and the recession will put paid to this overweening, anti-social project.

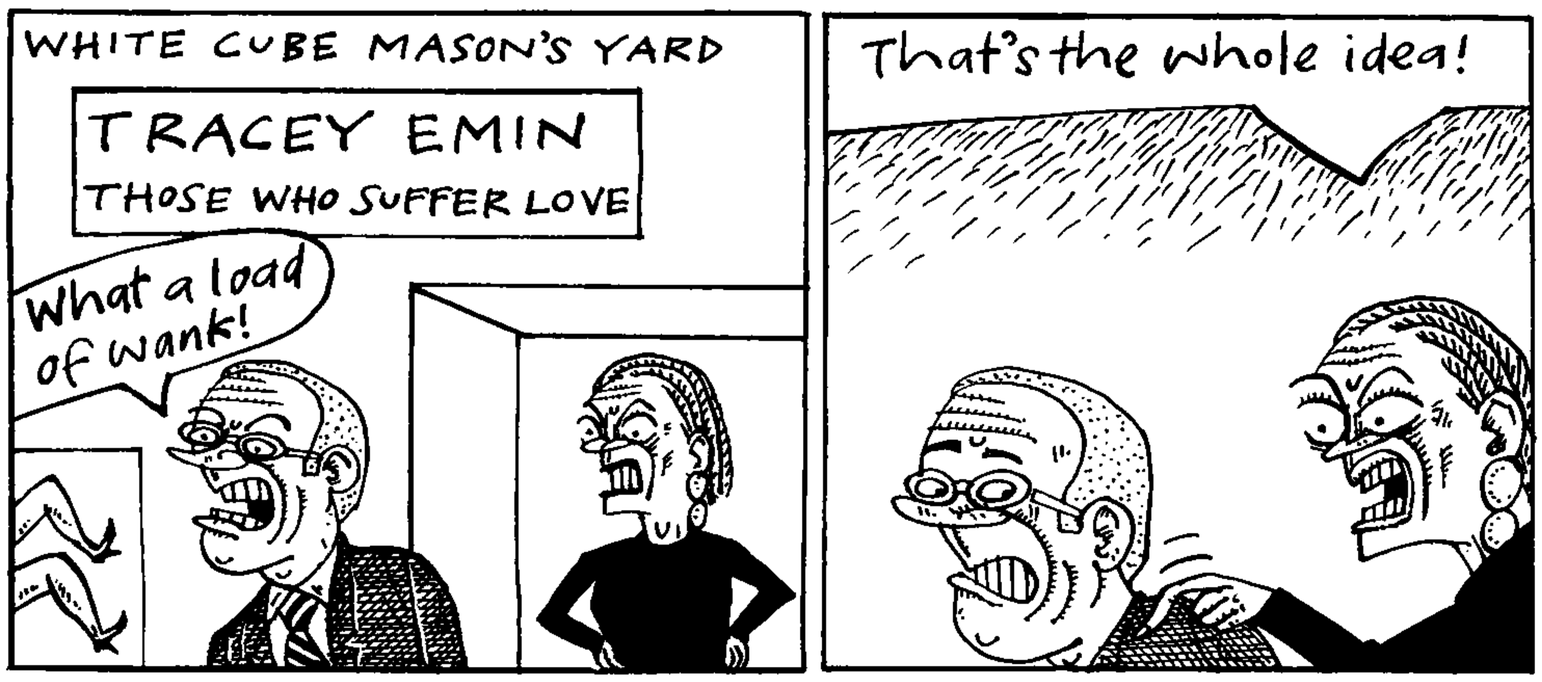
IT WAS depressing that the Civic Trust went bust in April. Set up in 1957 by Duncan Sandys, it had lost its way in recent years and was a victim of the recession, brought down by financial over-ambition. But the Civic Trust had done a huge amount of good, so it is cheering that an effort is being made to set up a new organisation to pursue its core aims.

The Civic Society Initiative aims to provide "a national voice and support for the civic society movement". And this is sorely needed. Embarrassed politicians are constantly mouthing weasel words about more democracy. But real democracy in Britain is represented by the myriad local societies and action groups usually established by volunteers to resist some monstrous threat emanating from politicians and their friends – new runways at Heathrow and Stansted, Pathfinder demolition schemes, yet more Tesco stores and the like. After all, such societies have many more members in total than all the political parties put together.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH



I-SPY *Pendle, Lancs.*

THE PLAYING OF
• BALL GAMES •
RIDING OF CYCLES
EXORCISING OF DOGS
STRICTLY PROHIBITED

Submitted by Amy Blackburn. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THE formula of screaming ignorance, kitsch and smug self-satisfaction that is Classic FM isn't new. But it's intensified since Radio 3 won Station of the Year in last month's Sony awards.

The Classic bosses weren't happy at all; and so to divert attention they increased sharply the volume of their hymns of self-love.

To select but one absurdity among many, they're advertising a new, double CD with the title *Made Famous by Classic FM*. And what are the pieces CFM has made famous? Well, there's *The Lark Ascending* by Vaughan Williams, who of course owed his career to CFM. There's Rachmaninov's 2nd Piano Concerto, which did get briefly a bit of exposure in some film or other, but it was a long time ago. Then there's the Clarinet Concerto by an unknown called, er, Mozart (but only the 2nd Movement: Wolfgang will have to wait for CFM to make the rest of his effort famous). And Handel's *Zadok* Coronation Anthem – what's a royal investiture, after all, without a Classic FM soundtrack?

As if this guff weren't bad enough, the CFM website (which incidentally commends the theme from *Star Wars* as a wedding anthem) also catalogues the Classic FM empire. There music lovers will be interested to learn that the station has its "own" orchestras: the LSO, the Philharmonia, the Royal Liverpool Phil ("CFM's orchestra in the north-west") and the Royal Scottish National ("CFM's orchestra in Scotland"). It also has its own opera company apparently, Welsh National, and a music college. Very impressive – and great news for hard-pressed taxpayers who were under the illusion it was they who propped up these institutions.

The bad news for Classic FM is that several legally-minded music lovers, unamused by the station's absurd claims, are considering a test case under trades descriptions legislation. If it goes ahead, it will be interesting to see what evidence Classic produces to verify its ownership of the LSO and its gift of celebrity to Mozart. Even if the case is thrown out as frivolous, the sight of CFM in court won't be wasted on its many friends at Broadcasting House.

DESPERATE times call for desperate measures. Thus later this month the BBC Symphony orchestra will give the world premiere of a piece by Sir Richard Rodney Bennett in a shopping centre (the Westfield in Shepherds Bush: it's called outreach).

More tellingly, the even more desperate Royal Philharmonic is seeking refuge from its half-empty concerts at Cadogan Hall by taking any job it can get – including a July date at a Surrey race-track where it will play to the horses with renditions of Rossini's overture to *William Tell*.

The RPO has tried to dress this bit of nonsense up as a serious experiment, sanctioned by the Jockey Club and various animal psychologists, to see if music improves the horses' performance. If so, the music could presumably come from a CD. It doesn't need to be live; and it will in any event be relayed through loudspeakers.

Alas, this is another case of a once-proud orchestra throwing dignity to the wind for the sake of a few much-needed bucks. But at least the RPO can expect an audience of 2,000 at the races, the biggest crowd it's had for a long while. And that's not counting the horses.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Napier wit

Sir,

Thank you for making a stand for justice against Michael Napier and the Law Society. I have been a solicitor since 1993 and have found that the work done by the Law Society in representing solicitors to the public and the government is very valuable, but I have always been amazed at the disproportionate way the Law Society's regulation has targeted very small firms and sole practitioners with never a censure for the great and the good in the upper echelons of the profession. With this landmark judgement we solicitors are one step closer to understanding the hypocrisy, corruption and hubris at the Law Society and hopefully one step closer to tackling it.

I could add that solicitors' regulation has a proven disproportionate effect on ethnic minority practitioners, but that's another story.

Yours etc,
KAMRAN CHASE-RAHMAN,

London N3.

Sir,

You have every right to be pleased with the Appeal Court decision in the Michael Napier case. However, my understanding from the limited reports I have seen is that their Lordships of Appeal upheld a decision by your favourite bête noire, Mr Justice Eady, who found against Napier at first instance. Eady may be a menace, but you need to be consistent. Otherwise, it makes you look capricious and a bit fairweather.

Kind regards,
DAVID GREEN,

Dunedin, New Zealand.

Sir,

The revelations on the appalling Michael Napier that you are now, thankfully, able to give us (Part 1, Eye 1237), do, it has to be said, lack a certain balance. Nowhere in the first instalment do I find any reference to the man's wonderfully endearing sense of humour, so incisively characterised in his Who's Who entry: "Recreation: mountain biking in Norfolk." Ho bleeding ho.

Best,
A. MAYNARD,

Via email.

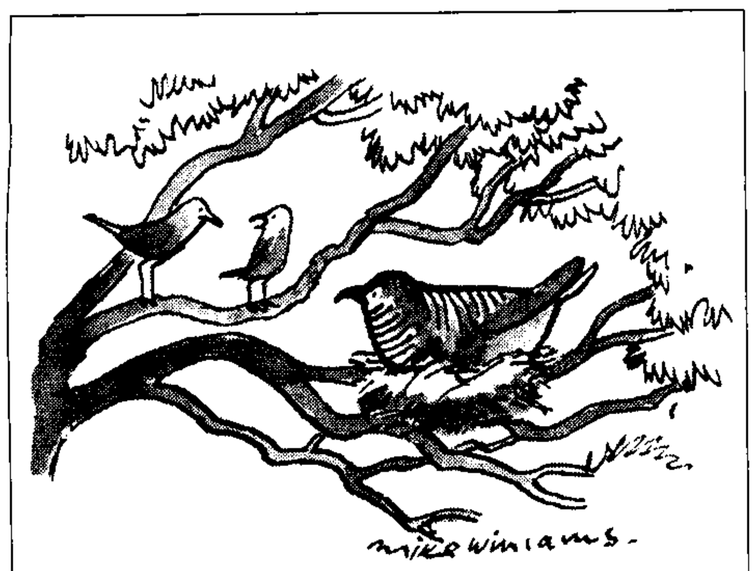
Sir,

Re Carter Ruck and Anthony Steen, Eye 1237. "... [the] lawyers were so proud of themselves that they ran a boastful piece about the case in the latest issue of their ridiculous magazine..."

Are you sure this doesn't refer to the two pages published on the matter by, er, Private Eye?

J.F. WICK,

Sheffield.



*"Are you **sure** I'm the father?"*

Call centre

Sir,

The new government helpline for vulnerable workers does indeed take calls for the Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA), which protects workers in agriculture food-processing and shellfishing.

However we still have our own direct helpline 0845 602 5020 (Russian and Polish spoken) and welcome information from anyone who has information which may help us in that task. You can also fill in our form on www.gla.gov.uk, in six different languages.

Yours etc,
PAUL WHITEHOUSE,

Chairman, Gangmasters Licensing Authority, Nottingham.

Conspiracy theory

Sir,

I'm so deeply sorry that Dr B. Ching's correspondent risked injuring their back and knees trying to use a ticket machine sited at a height accessible to wheelchair users (Signal Failures, 1236).

On the other hand, your more astute readers might have noticed shome mistake, shurely. In 2009, wheelchair users need access support for the vast majority of train journeys in the UK, and this has to be arranged at least 24 hours in advance. As a time-honoured conspiracy-sniffing Private Eye reader, I do wonder whether these lower machines are there for propaganda rather than ticket-buying purposes to help everyone else forget that the opportunity to turn up, buy a ticket and travel doesn't exist for some people.

Best wishes,
NATTY TRISKEL,

Bristol.

Lookalike

Sir,

I was wondering if any of your readers would be able to cast any light on why a tragically departed comedian and occasional magician was seen at the launch of the Crossrail project at Canary Wharf the other week?

Yours faithfully,
IAN MANSFIELD,

London E14.

Cooper

PM

Ill intentions

Sir,

As an NHS consultant I follow M.D.'s column closely and so was horrified to learn this week that the thrust of Modernising Medical Careers (MMC) was not to improve postgraduate medical training but to offset the costs of the new consultant contract by bringing in a sub-consultant grade by the back door.

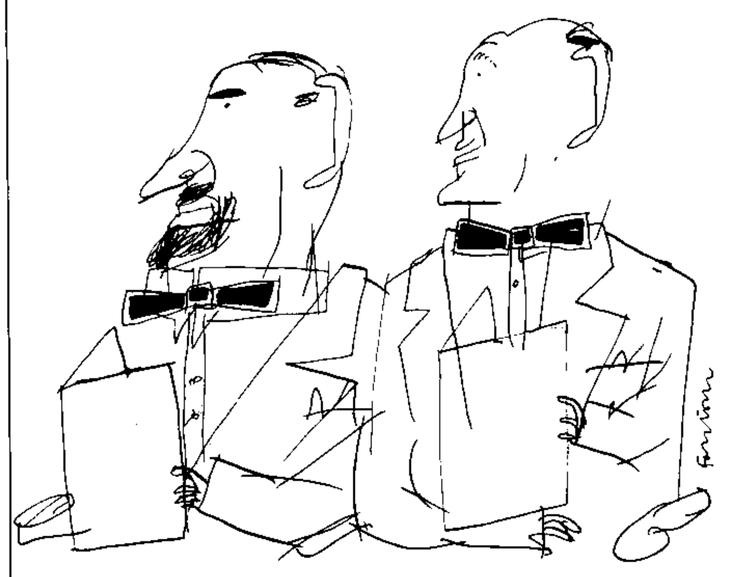
MMC has been an absolute disaster from every perspective and it is a great pity that the postgraduate training of doctors in this country has been greatly harmed when the desired grade of doctor already existed.

When I trained, the sub-consultant grade was referred to as a senior registrar.

Yours faithfully,
NICHOLAS M. WHEAR,

Birmingham.

Scenes You Seldom See



"It's not over until the fat lady who should have won stops singing"

Nursing: a grievance

Sir,

Re Alison Wilson's reply to Medicine Balls (Letters, Eye 1237). Working as a qualified nurse for the past 17 years, I can wholeheartedly agree with her assertion that there are "some good wards" in hospitals.

I can also express agreement with the recurrent frustration the public faces in obtaining meaningful and accurate information about how hospitals are "performing".

I would certainly be most grateful, should Ms. Wilson manage to obtain data relating to which wards are staffed by "bone idle sluts of nurses who couldn't give a fuck", if she could forward this information to myself. Having spent many years working for up to 15 hours a day alongside nurses (male and female), desperately trying to provide care resembling something you would wish for yourself, battling against ridiculous paperwork, and referring to resources which are continually stretched to breaking point, I would like to exert choice for myself in seeking a post alongside such "sluts of nurses".

This could possibly lead to a much more rewarding position for myself.

EDDIE ADLUM,

Via email.

University challenge

Sir,

I was glad to see that 'Piloti' is highlighting the threat to Greenwich Market (Nooks & Corners, 1237). I should point out, however, that the educational establishment on the site of the Naval college is the University of Greenwich, not the "University" of Greenwich. It awards degrees, it's a university, it's essentially the same as Oxford or Cambridge (deep breaths, don't panic).

PATRICK BROWNE
(Loughborough and Goldsmiths),

Maidstone.

A poet writes...

Sir,

Joanna Lumley
Is very comely.
Would she have
achieved as much for
the Gurkha
Had she had to wear
a burqa?

STEPHEN
REID,

Via email.

Pedantry Corner

*... As much as I hate to be pedantic about your Premiersh*ts cartoon, any football supporter should know that the lines "... some people are on the pitch... they think it's all over... it is now!" come from Kenneth Wolstenholme's famous 1966 World Cup commentary and not John Motson, as clearly depicted in Eye 1235.*

PHILIP LEWIS (aged 46¾).

... In editing my submission for Funny Old World (1236), you refer to Whitehorse as "near Toronto". Whitehorse is in the Yukon Territory, Toronto is in Ontario, approximately 5,500 km away.

ALASTAIR FAIRWEATHER.

... Re Dumb Britain, 1237. Things that are red may not necessarily include books, but books are read! Unless you count celebrity "autobiographies". Full marks to Michelle, minus several million to Lord Gnome.

PAUL COYNE.

... Ian Hendry was not Steed's first sidekick (Pedantry Corner, Eye 1237); rather, it was the other way around. Hendry's character (a spin-off from an earlier series "Police Doctor") was investigating the murder of his wife and was joined by the Steed character, although by the end of Series 1 Hendry's character had dwindled and Steed became dominant.

Dr Martin King and Venus Smith (played by Jon Rollason and Julie Stevens respectively) then, briefly, featured as "companions" to Steed's character.

Cathy Gale (Honor Blackman) was, in effect, Steed's fourth (and subsequently sole) partner, but third "sidekick". The template was set, however, by her arrival. The Steed/Gale partnership only really became exclusive by the start of the third series and continued with the transition to the Mrs Peel (Diana Rigg) character.

I really should go out more.

TOMMY COYNE.

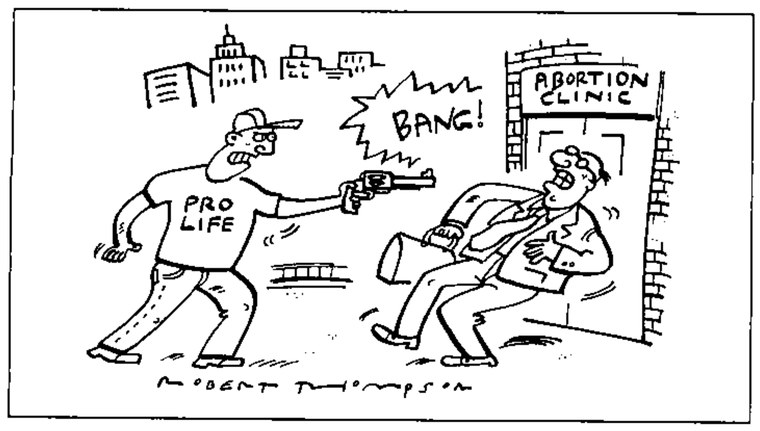
● Thank you for the many fascinating letterzzz on this subject. Ed.

... While Neil Cumming may be right in stating that it was the "At Last The 1948 Show" cast who wrote and performed the "Four Yorkshiremen" sketch first, proper credit should be given to Stephen Leacock. The idea behind the sketch is clearly taken from Leacock's "Self-Made Men" piece first published in 1897 [in New York's "Truth" magazine].

TONY PERCY.

*... Does W. Rees-McGonagall not understand the subtle (but important) differences between English parliamentary history (ended 1707 with the Act of Union, includes Speaker Trevor), British parliamentary history (started 1707, includes Gorbals Mick), and Westminster parliamentary history (covers the lot)? Gorbals Mick may have been worse, but he wasn't an English Speaker in **any** sense!*

ANDREW BELL.



Pseudo Names

... "Father Ped" article (Eye 1237)... very poor taste... bottom of the barrel... cancelling subscription, etc.

KATH HORLICK
PETER FILE.

... Please don't stop Pseudo Names. It brightens my otherwise dull existence.

MATT BLACK.

... Reading this column of wonderful names is like visiting an exotic place you will never see again.

C. NAPLES & DAI.

... My friends Mr Spock, Mr Sulu, Mr Chekhov, Dr McCoy and myself are perplexed by your planet's fondness for Pseudo Names. Where we come from no one would ever pretend to be someone else and we can no longer feel sure whom it is we are addressing. We will now take whatever action we deem necessary to protect our own sanity.

FAYE ZERSON-STUNN.

... I can't understand why there is so much hatred towards your Pseudo Names section! Let's stop the hating and start a Love Train!

P. POOLE
OLIVER LEE WULD
JOY NANDS.

... These Pseudo Names are brilliant – the new rock and roll.

BRUCE WADE-SHOES.

... I seem to have forgotten the object of the Pseudo Names section; could you please remind me?

C. NYLE.

... Just to reassure you that the continuing saga of Pseudo Names will not affect what I always do with my subscription.

IRENE HEWITT.

... Apologies for not having written earlier to compliment you on the excellent Pseudo Names section.

BO NYDAL.

... We think your Pseudo Names column is awesome, man. You is cool, innit.

REECE PECK
HUGH DEMANN.

... Re Pseudo Names. If you decide to scrap this feature, I'm your man.

N.E. OLD-IRON.

... The Psuedo Names feature is fantastic! We should share a few cocktails to celebrate.

MO HETO.

... I don't know what my fellow countrymen Tim O'Tay and Albert O'Balsam are complaining about – at least they have hair to wash.

AL O'PECIA.

... Since both your previous Celtic contributors Tim O'Tay and Albert O'Balsam will be washing their hair and will be unable to contribute to the next issue, I recommend my company's reasonably priced shampoo for everyday use.

ED N. SHOULDERS.

... The false names in the letters pages may be a bit childish, but they are great fun nonetheless. Just when you think they have gone they appear again!

P. KABU.

Bang to rights

Sir,

"The lock keeper at Old Windsor Lock safely cleared the area after a boat caught fire, then exploded." (p28, Eye 1236).

Tee hee.

Regards,
PAUL SANDERS,
Via email.

Lookalikes we've been had

Sir,

Your most recent Lookalike (Letters, 1237) is a comparison that has been doing the rounds on the internet for quite a while now, and the version that you have printed in actual fact features a manipulated photograph of Emma Watson, where parts of Richard Dawkins's face have been pasted onto hers to manipulate the effect.

Yours,
ADAM F. MESSUPE,
Via email.

● Whoops! Apologies for the slip. And thank you to all the readers who pointed it out. Ed.

Lookalike

Meerkat

Radio 4's Evan Davis

Sir,

With the latest revelations regarding human origins, perhaps we should now claim to be descended from a really interesting member of the animal kingdom: the Meerkat, say.

GORDON PETHERBRIDGE,
North Bucks.

"Aah, summer and the sound of willow on leather..."

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Roy Keane: a personification of himself, in a way."

MATT JACKSON, Radio 5 Live
(Mark Price)

"... putting their snouts in the gravy train..."

DAME ANN LESLIE, ITV
(Paul Tidey)

"The whole transformation of the game has just turned."

TEDDY SHERINGHAM, ITV
(Greg Bradshaw)

"Not an easy catch but, equally, not a difficult catch."

MARK NICHOLAS, Channel 5
(Nigel Pearson)

"... when the PM saw this immovable object [Joanna Lumley] coming at a hundred miles an hour towards him..."

KEITH VAZ, Channel 4 News
(M. Henry)

Letter from **Tokyo**

from Our Own Correspondent

WHAT do you if you are a bumblingly detached prime minister with all the charisma of cold pizza, presiding over the biggest recession in a generation? In Japan we may have found the answer.

Just a few weeks ago Taro Aso, our ultra-conservative and traditionalist prime minister, enjoyed a popularity rating of just 9 percent. But just when his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in power virtually unbroken for 55 years, appeared to be heading for the long grass, salvation beckoned. The opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was consumed by a monumental corruption scandal involving its leader, Ichiro Ozawa.

Ozawa had "no idea", he said, that his chief political secretary had falsely reported ¥35m (£250,000) of dodgy donations from a scandal-ridden construction firm. It turned out, however, that Ozawa himself had trousered ¥300m (£2.15m) in donations from the same firm, which strangely enough seemed to have won a generous share of the public-works contracts on offer in Ozawa's home constituency. Ozawa, with a billion yen real estate fortune in Tokyo and numerous other alleged links to contractors – but no apparent sense of irony – subsequently called for a total ban on corporate donations.

It took two months and plunging opinion polls before he was ready to fall on his sword. When he did, the choice of successor was far too important to be left to the rank and file, allowing party barons to settle on DPJ secretary-general Yukio Hatoyama. At just 62, he is a mere pup in this gerontocracy – but not your everyday, man-of-the-people politician: his strange, other-worldly countenance has earned him the nickname "alien".

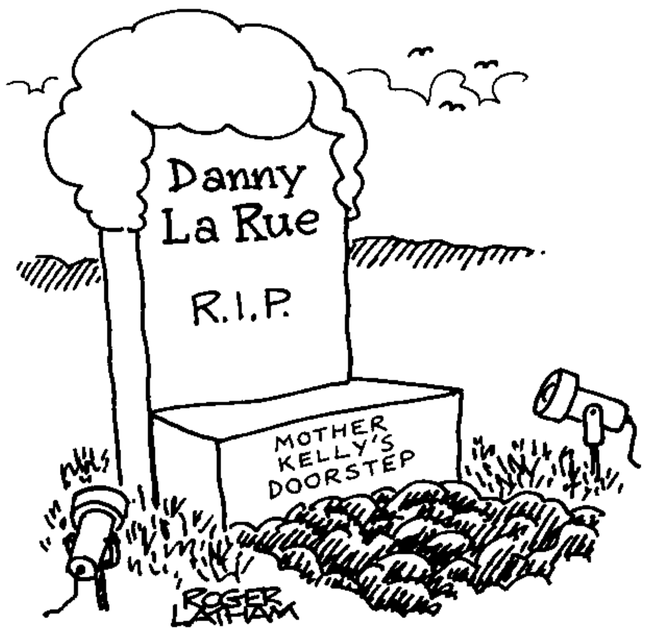
With impeccable timing, the new, rejuvenated DPJ chose to campaign against the number of hereditary MPs in our Diet. Fully one-third of the 304 LDP MPs are either political scions or somehow politically linked through marriage or grand-parents. Alas, the opposition's new leader is a man whose great-grandfather was the Lower House Speaker, whose grandfather was PM, and whose father was a foreign minister.

His brother, Kunio, meanwhile, is on the other side of the political tracks as a favoured but sinister member of premier Aso's inner circle. His tireless efforts at signing execution warrants during his brief tenure as justice minister two years ago earned him the nickname "Angel of Death" and Japan a place in Amnesty's Top 10 enthusiasts for the death penalty, alongside North Korea, Saudi Arabia and China.

Still, even an alien cannot be his brother's keeper and the prime minister appears gamely to be doing his best to help the opposition remove him from office when elections come around in the autumn. Since he came to power last September Aso has surrounded himself with clannish second-rate arch-conservatives. Who can forget ex-finance minister Shoichi Nakagawa, whose shambolic self-destructive drunken turn at the G-7 in February came even though he was widely known for being a vicious drunkard long before Aso appointed him?

Another unpleasant ultra-rightist senior cabinet minister only lasted four days in his job after managing to insult the indigenous Ainu race, all foreigners and Japanese who complained of noise pollution near airports, before capping it by calling Japan's biggest teachers' union "a cancer". The latest senior Aso crony to go, a 68-year-old deputy chief cabinet secretary who once boasted of dating ten women simultaneously, resigned in mid-May for using his state rail pass to go on a golfing trip to discuss Uganda with a younger female acquaintance.

Aso himself, whose family fortune was partly helped by Korean and Allied slave labour in the Second World War, is a master at foot-in-mouthism, insisting in these straitened times that carousing until the wee hours in Tokyo's luxury hotel bars on a nightly basis was "not expensive" and that it didn't matter anyway as he was merely using his "own pocket money".



From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Andrew Flintoff complains that foreign hotel staff cannot understand him

Language can be a problem with foreigners these days. The other day I had a bit of a tear-up with a traffic warden, and as I drove off I shouted: "You're chocolate, sunshine!" (When I was a boy in the East End this was an everyday expression, meaning "you've had it, son!") Trouble is, the chap was Nigerian and he took it amiss on account of his colour. Now he's gone and complained to the carriage office. The irony is that last week I took a party of youngsters from Tower Hamlets to Margate. There was whites, pinks, yellows, browns and liquorice allsorts, but all as English as mutton bags. We had cockles, winkles and jellied eels courtesy of Tubby Isaacs, and half of them were sick on the way home. Two got arrested for shoplifting and one for criminal damage, but no one was stabbed and it was a smashing day out. – ***Chris_the_cabbie***

I agree that foreigners should speak English, especially when in England, but my views are not reflected in parliament. I didn't vote in the election, however, because the hot weather adversely affected the air quality in our village, and I stayed indoors with the children. My worry is that one day I might be influenced to vote BNP without realising their true nature. – ***Emily***

Every ballot paper in the election was spoilt anyway. By having the Labour Party's name on it – ***Brown_out***

The English have become decadent and effete. We "vote" furtively in secret booths where once we did battle on heath and field. The results are there for all who have eyes to see. – ***Athelstan***

Time to end the disastrous democratic experiment – ***Sword_of_Truth***

MARY WILSON TO JOIN CABINET

by Our Political Staff **Marcia Forkbender**

IN A last throw of the dice, the beleaguered Prime Minister has offered a cabinet post to Mary Wilson, widow of the late Wislon of Rievaulx.

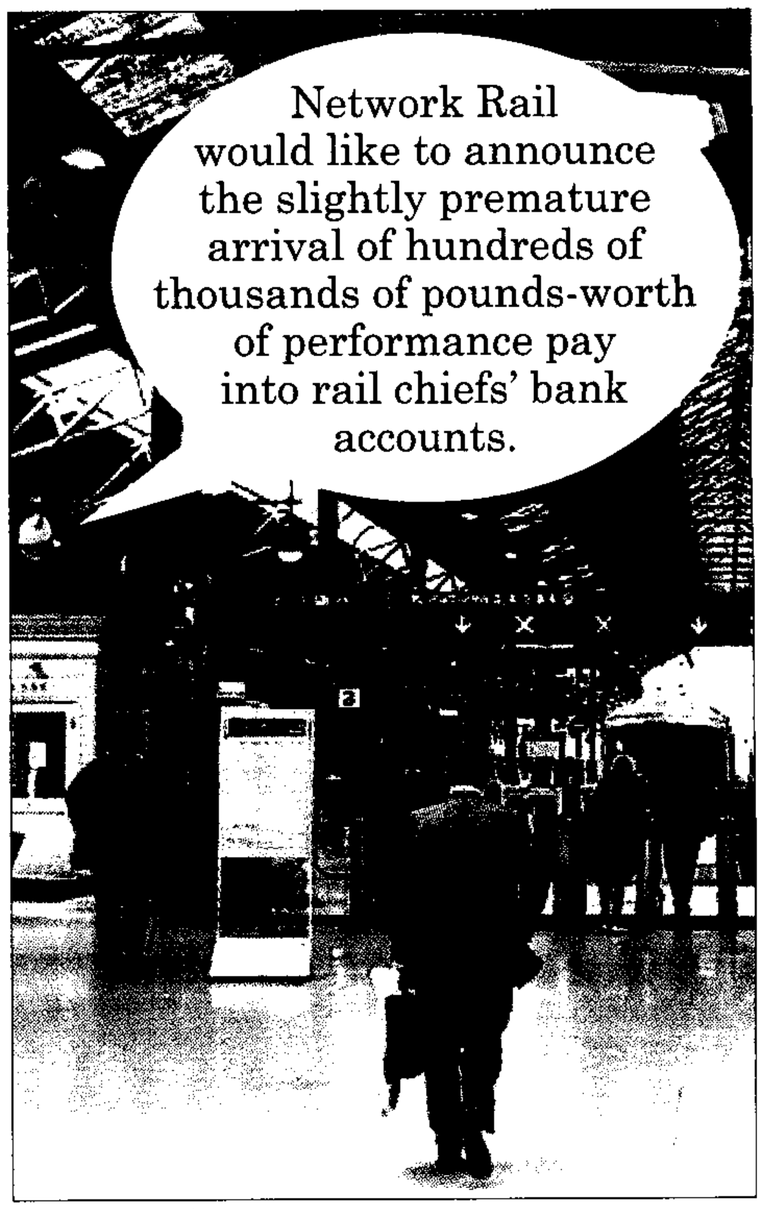
Well known for her amateur poetry, Mary Wilson is to join the Cabinet as Minister for Verse and Verse.

Said the Prime Minister, "We need fresh faces in the Cabinet and Mrs Wilson will add a feminine touch to our exciting new team."

The PM then denied that he had already offered the post to the late Mrs Audrey Callaghan, the late Lady Attlee and the very late Mrs Ramsay MacDonald.

That Reshuffle In Full

OUT GOES	IN COMES
Alistair Darling	Alistair Darling
David Miliband	David Miliband
Alan Johnson	Alan Johnson
Peter Mandelson	Peter Mandelson
Gordon Brown	Gordon Brown *(That's enough reshuffle, Ed.)*



● **Funny Old World will be back in the next issue**

WHAT YOU MISSED

THAT BBC EURO ELECTION NIGHT SPECIAL IN FULL

Dimblebore *(for it is still him)*: And this really is the most extraordinary night of drama, even though most of the results are yet to come in. Emily, what's going on in Benelux?

Emily Maitliss *(for it is she)*: Well, David, I should stress that this is a Euro Election and not a General Election, so we can't extrapolate directly, but so far in Benelux the one result we have shows a swing away from the centre left parties like the Christian Social Democrats and the Democratic Christian Socialists.

Dimblebore *(nodding as if he is not asleep)*: And what about the centre right parties, Emily, such as the National Christian Democrats?

Maitliss *(points to large chart)*: Well, the projections are that their vote will fall because of widespread defections to the fringe parties, such as the ultra-rightwing Christian National Democratic Fascists and their rivals, the National Fascist Christian Democrats...

Dimbebore: I'll have to stop you there, Emily, because there is sensational news in from West Avon, that's a North-East country seat in Sussex, and it's an incredible victory for the United Kristian Independence party.

And if that were repeated at a General Election then UKIP would be forming the next British government. An incredible thought. Polly Toynbee, you've managed to stay awake... what's your view on this amazing result?

Polly Toynbee: Well, David, you have to remember that the turnout in West Avon was only 7% and UKIP only managed to attract 17 votes, but the fact that the Labour candidate was 7th in the poll behind the Eco-No-To-Plastic-Bag Party and the Pro-Viagra-Compulsory-Latin-In-Schools Alliance must act as a wake-up call to the Labour Party and...

Dimblebore: Sorry, we'll have to stop you, Polly, as Jeremy Vine has got some extraordinary news...

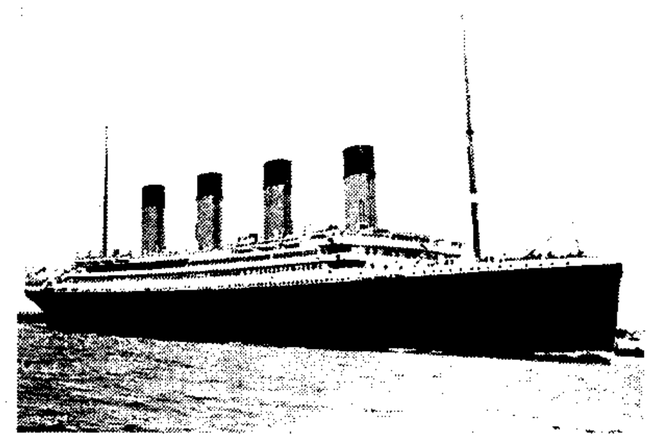
Jeremy Vine: Yes, our latest figures show that no one is now watching this programme. This is an absolutely unprecedented situation.

Dimblebore: So, what does this mean actually, Jeremy?

Vine: Well, David, it means we can all go home and read about the elections tomorrow in the papers.

(Closedown)

LAST SURVIVOR OF TITANIC STILL ALIVE (JUST)



by Our Disaster Staff **MICHAEL WHITESTAR**

THE LAST known survivor of the Titanic was still on the ship today.

Gordon Brown, 75, told reporters, "Everything is fine. Just because you hit an iceberg you don't walk away. I feel confident that our ship will soon reach its destination with a loss of all lives. There is a job to be done and I am the man to do it."

Full list of casualties p. 94

Advertisement

From Gnome Souvenirs

THE CAROLINE FLINT MEMORIAL PLATE

WHO can forget where they were when they heard the news that glamorous Caroline Flint, Minister for Europe, had resigned?

Now you can cherish the moment for ever with this superb heritage plate. Made from Flint-style plastic by the master craftsmen of *Pishpur in India*, this wonderful memento is not only an investment but an heirloom to be treasured by your children and the children they have when they are 66.

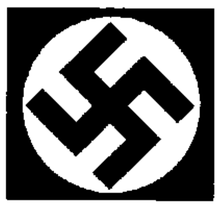
WARNING: Do not put your Flint Plate in your Cabinet. It may fall out and cause significant damage.

Price £755.99 (plus p&p)
Hurry, hurry, while you remember who she is.

Exclusive To All Newspapers

Newspapers Give BNP Too Much Publicity

THEY ARE an insignificant and irrelevant party, representing a minute section of the electorate. They have just scored a minor victory in the Euro Elections. And yet, still newspapers devote huge headlines and acres of column inches to the British National Party in an attempt to scare their readers and persuade them that this pathetic group of extremists are much more dangerous than they actually are. With big pictures of Nick Griffin *(see above)* and huge Nazi swastikas to spice things up a bit these irresponsible newspapers are *(cont. pp. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6-94)*



●Exclusive to the Daily Telegraph and all other newspapers.

MP Denies 'Flip-Flop' Claim

INVESTIGATION
THE EXPENSES FILES DAY 994

by Telegraph Expenses Team
C.D. HACKS

LIB DEM backbencher Barry Beard, MP for the Cornish constituency of Polzero, last night reacted angrily to the Daily Telegraph's sensational revelation that he had attempted to claim a £2.99 pair of flip-flops on his House of Commons "Second Holiday Home" allowance.

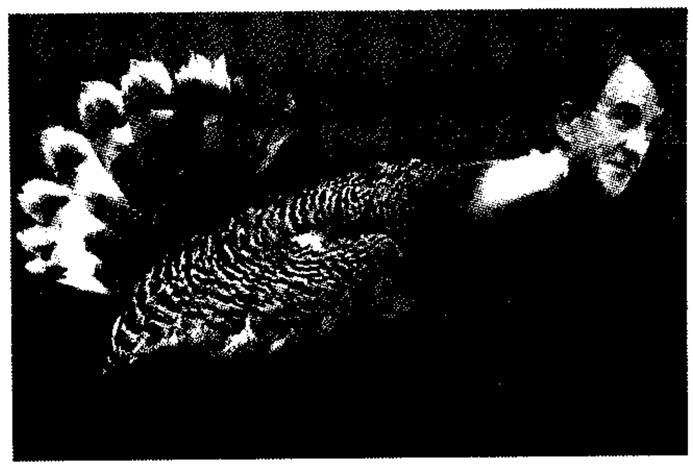
The Fees Office, however, rejected the claim on the grounds that the "beach footwear" acquired from Old Jethro's Surf 'n' Dive shoreside emporium was not directly related to Beard's performance of his duties as an MP.

"I utterly repudiate these baseless allegations," said an outraged Beard last night, "and I will be stepping down at the next election."

Other incredible revelations about MPs' expenses on pages 2-94 in today's *Daily Telegraph*

- Luxury mushroom soup tin found in ex-Minister's wheelie-bin.
- MP's wife "bought new hat" – he said it was "within the new rules".
- Labour backbencher did not declare 10p piece he found on pavement.

NATURE NOTES with Derwent May



Great Bastard Re-introduced To Britain

CONSERVATIVES are delighted at the news that one of Britain's most unloved creatures has been successfully re-introduced to this country from the continent of Europe.

The Great Bastard (*Mandelsonius bruxellius salvenauticus*) was brought back to Britain two years ago, and has been a familiar sight on television.

■ **Full story plus pics p.94.**

POETRY CORNER

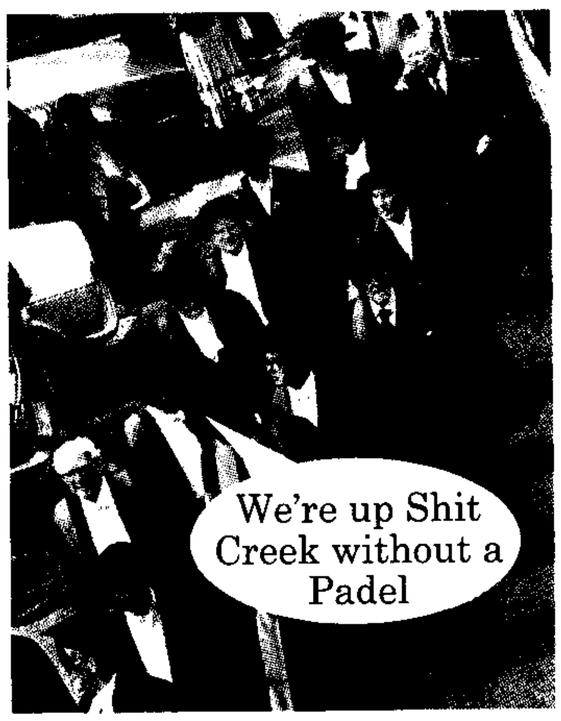
Lines On The Resignation Of Ruth Padel As Oxford Professor Of Poetry

So. Then farewell
Ruth Padel.

Unlike mine,
Your poems don't rhyme.

E.J. Thribb
Professor of Poetry at the University of Twitter (formerly Hay-on-Fry Polytechnic)

OXFORD POETRY CONTEST



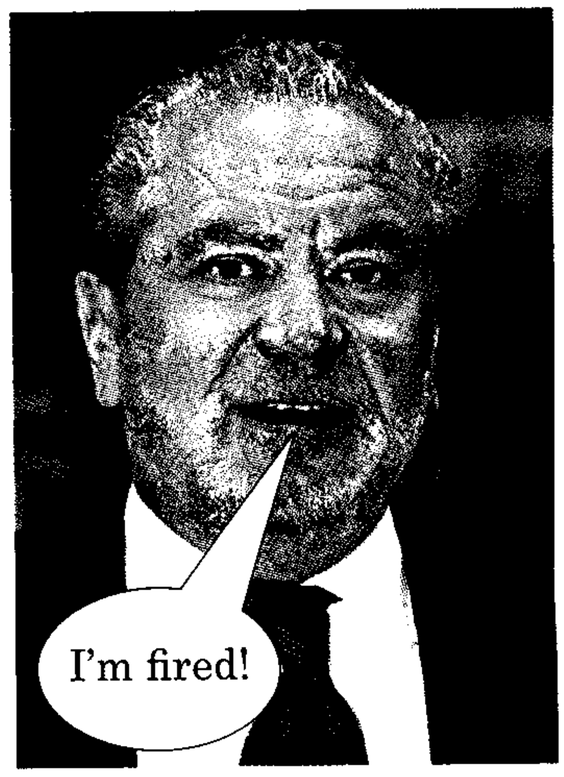
GB 'FILES FOR BANKRUPTCY PROTECTION'

IN THE biggest collapse in history, the one-time colossus GB last night sensationally filed for bankruptcy protection.

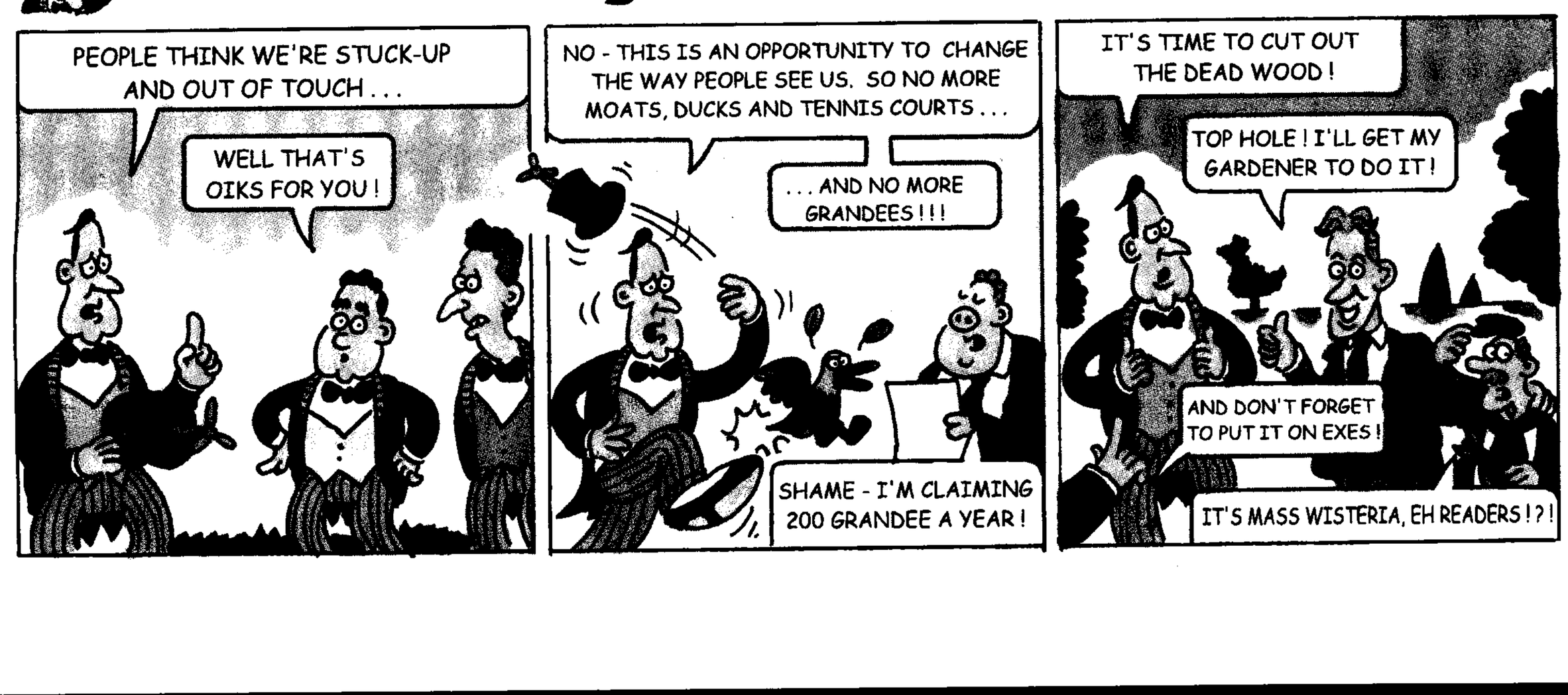
"We're out of ideas about how to secure GB's longterm future and, therefore, we need immediate protection," admitted a spokesman, Mr GB. "Our only hope now is that some plan will emerge from this which would allow GB to continue somehow in a reduced form."

Most commentators, however, were deeply sceptical about the longterm future for GB, advising a complete break-up and sell-off for the *(cont. p. 94)*

SUGAR IN BBC CONFLICT OF INTEREST SHOCK



Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


PEOPLE THINK WE'RE STUCK-UP AND OUT OF TOUCH . . .
WELL THAT'S OIKS FOR YOU !
NO - THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE THE WAY PEOPLE SEE US. SO NO MORE MOATS, DUCKS AND TENNIS COURTS . . .
. . . AND NO MORE GRANDEES ! ! !
SHAME - I'M CLAIMING 200 GRANDEE A YEAR !
IT'S TIME TO CUT OUT THE DEAD WOOD !
TOP HOLE ! I'LL GET MY GARDENER TO DO IT !
AND DON'T FORGET TO PUT IT ON EXES !
IT'S MASS WISTERIA, EH READERS ! ? !

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 46

From the Desk of the Supreme First Secretary of the State, Lord President of the Supreme Soviet Council and Supreme Spokesman for the Supreme Leader (currently G. Brown)

Comrades, I want to reassure you that I am 100 percent behind the Supreme Leader, who is doing a magnificent job of saving Britain. I have total confidence in his abilities and I am directing you not to focus on the petty and irrelevant bickerings that have been drummed up by the media in an effort to discredit his wise helmsmanship. It is vital that you ignore the frivolous calls for a general election. What on earth would be the point of holding an election when we already have the finest leader anyone could choose? And is not so-called democracy hugely over-rated? Did the country need an election to choose me? No. Did we need an election to choose Comrade Lord Sir Alan Sugar? No. Did we need an election to choose Comrade Baroness Glenys Kinnock? No.

In fact, when the masses are allowed to vote they keep coming up with the wrong result! Witness the ridiculous recent results in the County and European polls. So let us all unite behind the Supreme Leader's new Cabinet of all the Talent Shows and stop the dangerous and futile attempts to sink the Ship of State as the Supreme Helmsman guides us through the storm.

And may I warn any party delegates who may feel tempted to engage in destabilist emailism that we now have the technology to penetrate their hard drives and identify their places of residence by means of Google Earth. So make no mistake, all you plotters and conspirators, I know where you live.

Yours sincerely,

Comrade Mandy

Official motto: I'm a writer, not a twitter

P.S. There have been a number of rumours suggesting that the Supreme Leader is dead. This is entirely untrue and I release below a recent picture of him looking happy and relaxed with a message for all his beloved people.

Comrades,

There is no meltdown! Whatever lies you may have been fed by the BBC-Murdochite-Rothermerist media, who would like you to believe that your leader is facing unprecedented difficulties and might even have to step down, I want to reassure you that I am totally in control and enjoy the unanimous support of the entire British nation.

Millions of people are so satisfied with the way I have been running the country that last week they did not even feel the need to go out to cast their votes. In not one but two elections they showed their appreciation of my efforts by staying at home.

They knew that I would read the message of this gesture correctly as a signal that I should carry on with the important task of saving the world economy.

If there has been any discontent among the masses, it has been directed, rightly, I have to say, at all those parasites in high places who have scandalously betrayed their country and their leader by their blood-sucking snout-in-troughism at the expense of hard-working British families.

And now some of these loathsome reptiles seek to wriggle out of their crimes by scuttling away into the darkness before I can sack them and pack them off into permanent exile.

Let me name and shame these vile traitors to our cause who have tried to undermine our entire movement by daring to resign because they are no good at their jobs.

Enemies of the People

1. **Ex-Comrade Jacqui Smith**, former Commissar for State Secrecy and Internal Security, who deliberately sabotaged my regime by allowing her husband to watch decadent Dirty-Desmondist films at the nation's expense, an insult to all those Sisters who have been working towards a more equal society, not to mention her other crimes relating to shameless flippism with regard to her second dacha.

2. **Ex-Comrade Hazel Blears**, one-time Chairman of the Party, who was caught out in even more flagrant acts of flippism than Comrade Smith. This grinning monkey actually dared to criticise your Supreme Leader in the Duma by calling his excellent and much-admired address to the nation on YouSSR-Tube "lamentable" and alleging that his smile was "insincere". Well, I'm not smiling now and nor is the rest of the country, as they watch this painted marionette being carried off to the salt mines of Saltford.

3. **Ex-Comrade Caroline Flint,** former Commissar for European Integration who dared to suggest that I was guilty of unreconstructed machoist sexism. What a stupid woman! She accused me of window-dressing – and now she has been defenestrated.

No doubt Comrades will have spotted the obvious link between these three enemies of the people. They are both members of the Blair-Babeist faction formed by the discredited former leader to act as an all-woman bodyguard dedicated to promoting the cult of his personality at all times.

4. **Ex-Comrade James Purnell,** former Commissar for Work and Pensions who although he is not a woman had the nerve to say that he had lost confidence in the Supreme Leader. The only thing that anyone knows about this spineless nonentity is that he fraudulently photo-shopped himself into a picture. Now I am air-brushing him out of the picture for ever. First Trotsky now Pathetic Purnell.

5. **This list is getting rather long** but suffice to

say Comrade Hutton, Comrade Hoon, Comrade McNulty, Comrade Uncle Tom Cobbleigh and all the other small number of fanatical Blairite lickspittles are all Enemies of the People as well.

When I was called on by the nation to become Supreme Leader and to rescue the country from the disastrous excesses of Blairite boom-and-bustism, I magnanimously allowed these grovelling Tonyist toadies to remain in office, despite their conspicuous lack of any ability to perform the tasks assigned to them.

And how have these brainwashed zombies repaid their Supreme Leader's benevolence? Only with the grossest acts of disloyalty ever witnessed in the history of disloyalty.

Fortunately, even in these regrettable times, there is one figure who stands out as a paragon of loyalty to his leader and devotion to the welfare of the people.

Who is this hero of the nation who deserves the plaudits of all right-thinking Comrades and whose abilities shine forth as a beacon lighting the way towards a glorious future? I refer, of course, to myself.

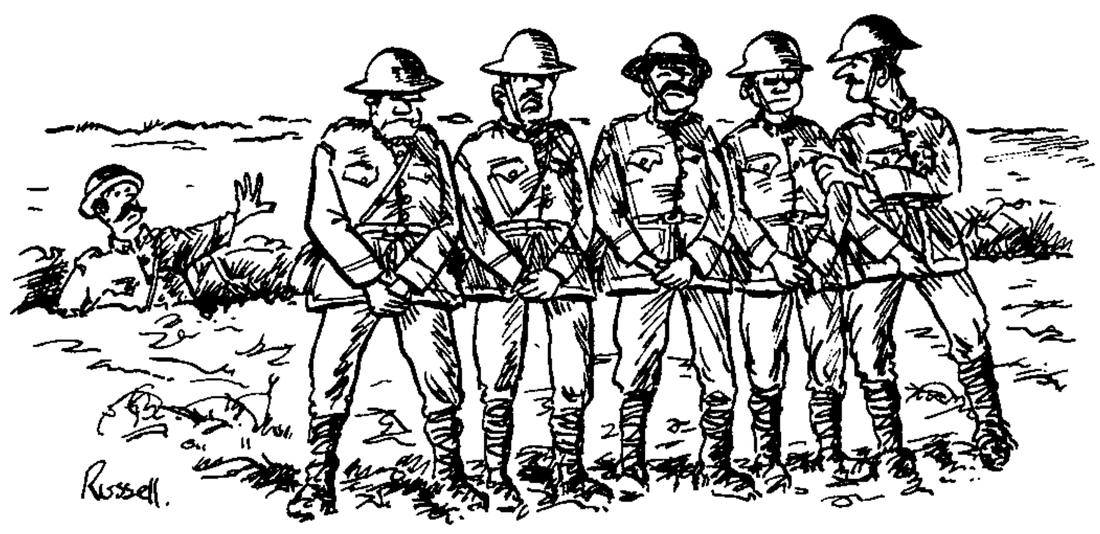
I am not arrogant, you all know that, but I can honestly say that I am the only person that I can trust in these difficult times. I will not walk away from myself. I have full confidence in myself. I am just going to lie down.

Yours,

Gordon Brown

Supreme Leader

"I feel that individual trust is breaking down"



"Is this really the best defensive tactic we've got?"

Nursery Times

Friday, June 12, 2009

PRINCE CHARMING TO SAVE SQUIRREL NUTKIN

by **Beatrix Harry Potter**

BELEAGUERED Red Squirrel, Squirrel Nutkin, has acquired a champion in the person of Prince Charming.

"It's appalling," he told the Nursery Times, "how these grey squirrels are ruining the whole environment by eating all the tree thingies and posing a real threat to our red friends like Nutkin by stealing their nuts. I mean there's no other word for it, is there? It's just appalling."

On other pages

● "Shoe House Prices on the Rise" Says Old Woman in Green Shoots Claim **2**

● World condemns North Korean Launch of Cow Over Moon **3**

OBITUARY

Danny La Wolf

Forest mourns great female impersonator wolf who famously dressed up as Red Riding Hood's grandmother.

GLENDA SLAGG

The Gal Who Gets Your Vote?!

■ **CAROLINE FLINT!?!! What a disgrace!?! So you think you look like Sophia Loren, walking out of the Cabinet on your high heels, a-poutin' and a-spoutin' about how badly Gordon's treated you!?! Not badly enough, darling!?! You've let us gals down with your whingin' and cringin' about so-called sexism!!? Cut out the bitchin' and snitchin', sweetheart, and if you think you look that good take a job on the catwalk – 'cos you're *catty* enough!?!? Geddit!!?**

■ THREE CHEERS for Caroline Flint!?! She's the saucy sexpot who's waltzed out of Brown's dreary Boys-Own Bunker and given us gals something to cheer about!?! With your high heels and red dress, you look just like Sophia Loren!?!! Only better!!?! And it took a woman to tell gloomy Gordon where to get off!? You've done us all a favour, Caroline, with your salvo against sexism!?!! Tell you what! You should take a job on the catwalk – 'cos you're easily beautiful enough!?!!

■ **HAZEL BLEARS, Jacqui Smith etc. What a disgrace!?!** ***(See above)***

■ HAZEL BLEARS, Jacqui Smith etc. What a disgrace!?! *(See above) (You're fired – Ed.)*

■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Meltdown Munchies!?!

● **Nigel Farage.** UKIP's Number One Sex-Bomb!?! Tell you what, Nige, UKIP round my place from now on!?! Geddit?!!

● **Nick Griffin.** BNP's hunky Führer!!?! OK, so he's a fat fascist but a girl can't be too choosy these days!?!

● **Lord Falconer.** Former Lord Chancellor and Tony Blair's old flatmate, stoopid!?! Care to share a flat with a woman for a change, Big Boy!?!!

Byeee!!

Let's Parlez Franglais!

avec Kilometres Kington

Numero 94

Le soixante-cinquième anniversaire de D-Day

(Une plage in Normandy. Le sixth June)

Le Prince de Wales *(pour c'est lui)*: Bonjour, M. Sarkozy.

Président Sarko: Qui est vous, matey?

Le Prince: Er, er... je suis le prochain King d'England.

Sarko (examinant le clipboard): Non, vous n'êtes pas sur le guest list.

Prince: C'est vraiment appalling, dans un vrai sense. J'ai no need d'un invitation-thingy. C'etait *nous*, les Anglais, qui avons liberés la France.

Sarko: Non, non, non, Monsieur Rosbif! J'ai vu Saving Private Ryan. C'était les Americains sous le fameux general Tom Hanks qui ont defeatés nos amis les Allemands.

Prince: Je don't believe que je suis hearing this!

Sarko: C'est absolument vrai! Vous pouvez visiter Obama Beach où les Americains et notre General de Gaulle ont made histoire et liberated le whole d'Europe.

(Entrez le grand President Obama)

Obama: Why, good evening, y'all. What a lovely little country you have here in Europe. Who are you two guys?

Prince: Je pense qu c'est temps pour retourner à Highgrove pour parler aux fleurs.

(Exit le Prince)

Sarko: Ah, Monsieur le Président. Bienvenu à mon humble celebration de D-Jour. Mais où est votre femme, Michelle? Quelle craqueuse. Une vraie routy-touty, n'est-ce pas? Même plus sexier que ma petite Carla!

(Entrez Carla)

Carla: Je heard that! Vous êtes en grand doo-doo.

Obama: It has been nice visiting with you folks. I think it is time for me to return to the White House. Have a nice D-Day!

Lines Written On The Appointment of Mr Scott Rennie As The First Openly Gay Minister In The History Of The Church Of Scotland

BY **WILLIAM REES-MCGONAGALL**

'Twas in the year of our Lord, two thousand and nine
That the Kirk of Scotland changed its former hard line.
For centuries under the dictates of the stern John Knox
They had told their ministers very firmly what they
could and couldn't do with their *(cont. verse 94)*

© W. Rees-McGonagall

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Letters to the Editor Painted Ladies

SIR – I have been following with great interest the many letters from your readers who have been astonished in recent weeks to see their gardens filled with painted ladies.

Alas, my own garden has not been graced by these exotic creatures, who, I am told, have come all the way from Africa to disport themselves on our lawns and sample our legendary British cream teas.

Nevertheless, as one who has been out East and seen a thing or two in my time, I have vivid memories of the painted ladies who in happier times were to be found in large numbers adorning the back streets of Kuala Lumpur.

I well remember one particular occasion when my adjutant Captain Frobisher and I were attempting to reach our club, Whites Only, for a spot of dinner and a quiet game of cribbage when we were waylaid by a dense flock of these painted ladies, insistent on providing us with the pleasures of the town. So pressing were they in their entreaties that we eventually succumbed to their invitation and, albeit reluctantly, joined them in the Kama Sutra Hotel at the junction of Lord Palmerston Road and Duke of Cambridge Avenue.

What happy days they were, and my only hope is that I can relive them this summer as these beautiful and delicate wonders of nature make a long overdue visit to the environs of Market Barkworth.

Yours faithfully,
Sir Herbert Gusset
Via email.

"Can I have a receipt?"

RYANAIR SHOCK

RYANAIR boss Michael O'Leary last night confirmed that the low-cost carrier was planning to make passengers fly the plane themselves.

"By sacking all of our pilots and allowing our passengers to fly the planes themselves, we'll be able to make considerable savings that will result in even lower ticket prices." *(Rotters)*

MYSTERY SURROUNDS TV KUNG-FU STAR DEATH

by Our Man In Bangcock

THE DEATH by auto-erotic asphyxiation of TV actor David Carradine has left observers mystified.

Inspector Na Ka of the Thai Homicide Squad told a press conference: "We cannot explain it. As far as we know he was not a Tory MP and yet we found him in the wardrobe" *(Cont. p. 94)*

THE BROON-ITES
THE MARAUDING MINISTERS MAKING A MELTDOWN!
Fountain and Jamieson
PA BROON IS HAVIN' ANOTHER WEE RESHUFFLE, YE KEN...
WELL AH'VE THOUGHT AN' THOUGHT, AND I'VE DECIDED...
AH THINK AH'LL SIT OVER THERE THIS TIME...
HENRY DAVIES

The Eye Says

SuBo – We Are All To Blame

NINETEEN million people have been complicit in one of the greatest tragedies of modern times.

As the doors of the Priory close behind the tortured figure of Susan Boyle, which one of us can put our hands on our hearts and say "We are not guilty"?

For we have all in our own way collaborated in plucking this shy recluse from the obscurity in which she had happily lived the first 47 years of her life and putting her into the harsh spotlight of the relentless merry-go-round that is celebrity today.

We chose her. We believed in her. We crucified her.

Every single person in Britain should today be hanging their head in shame, even if they have never heard the name of Susan Boyle... broken dreams... crushing of butterfly on wheel.. Princess Diana... human wreckage... exploiting the vulnerable... Shakespearean tragedy... all too predictable... grapefruit segments... your trains tonight... vote Conservative... is this enough? *(Yes, Ed. You're fired.)*

TRAGEDY OF 'WOMAN OUT OF HER DEPTH'

by Our Priory Staff **Magnus Shrinklater**

FOR DAYS she was on the front page of every newspaper in the land, the pint-size superstar who had come from nowhere to become one of Britain's best-known faces.

But it all proved too much for her. When the big time came, she wasn't up to it.

And today, smiling manically and screaming abuse at the media, she was carted off to one of the country's top psychiatric institutions, the Priory.

Hazel Nuts

None of us will ever forget the few brief moments when Hazel Blears became the darling of the nation, with her inimitable rendition of "I dreamed a dream of being Prime Minister", only to see her dream cruelly shattered.

The public went mad for Hazel, voting for her in their millions.

But even when she had the nation swooning at her feet, observers were quick to note signs of dangerous instability.

She could never remember which house she lived in, she forgot to pay her taxes, and she launched an unprovoked attack on her manager, Gordon Brown, the man who had discovered her when she was an unknown from Salford, telling her "Hazel, you've got what it takes – you could go all the way to the top."

It All Ends In Blears

The last straw came when Gordon was less than complimentary about her, calling her performance "totally unacceptable".

At this point she flipped *(Surely she did this earlier? Ed.)*, running round the corridors, waving a badge reading "Rocking The Vote" and shouting "I hate this show".

It was at this point that we all realised that Hazel Blears had totally lost it and that her amazing journey had come to an abrupt and tragic end.

BROWN TAKES DECISIVE ACTION

by Our Political Staff

AFTER all the accusations of dithering, the Prime Minister last night finally grasped the nettle and made his move.

In one fell swoop he confounded all the critics who had been claiming that the recent events in the political world had left him incapable of any positive initiative. Some had even said that he had lost his leadership qualities, but Gordon Brown's bold decision on Satuday night left Westminster reeling.

In retrospect, it looks obvious, but there is no doubt that by ringing Piers Morgan and asking after Susan Boyle's mental health, the Prime Minister has totally reinvigorated his premiership.

Gordon Is A Friend Of Moron

Said one seasoned Westminster commentator, "This is what the country needed to see. Anyone could have concentrated on the economy, focused on sleaze in the Cabinet or produced radical reforms for the constitution.

"But only Gordon had the guts and the vision to try and jump on the Susan Boyle bandwagon by phoning a judge on a TV talent show in the hope of ingratiating himself with the Saturday night telly-watching public."

He continued, "I think this will put an end to the doubts about his ability to hold the most important office in the land. Here is a man who can demonstrably ask his PR wife for Moron's phone number in time for him to have something cheesy to boast about on the Andrew Marr show."

Today there is a growing consenus that this moment will go down in the political history books as Brown's finest hour. For Churchill it was "We shall fight them on the beaches". For Thatcher it was "Rejoice, rejoice". For Brown it was "Hello Piers, it's me, Gordon. Gordon Brown the Prime Minister. Sarah's husband..."

A Doctor Writes

SUSAN BOYLE's public breakdown has been put down to 'learning difficulties' and rightly so.

The problem with Britain's newspapers is that they clearly find it difficult to learn anything from the last time they harassed a member of the public on a 24-hour basis.

Because they have diffulty comprehending simple things, like a sense of proportion, they tend to become ecstatically happy and then suddenly lash out in a foul-mouthed way, surprising many with their abrupt change in mood.

© A. Doctor.

SIMON COWELL HAS BREAKDOWN

IT WAS revealed last night that Simon Cowell was the second to suffer as a result of a Britain's Got Talent-related breakdown.

A spokesman for Cowell said, "Following the show Simon's accountant visited his dressing room and gave him the breakdown, which told him the bad news that he'd only managed to make a couple of million pounds from the show, causing the pop mogul to weep openly all the way to the bank."

BORIS IN CREEK TRAGEDY

"Mother, are you sure your marijuana use is purely medicinal?"

GREAT BRITISH RESIGNATIONS

The Royal Mail is pleased to announce the launch of a new set of stamps to commemorate the principled departure of most of the present and past Labour Cabinets.

NB. This set of stamps does not include Jane Kennedy and any one else who has resigned since we went to press.

Last day covers available from Royal Mail.

THE TIMES 12 JUNE 1811

Frumpy Virgin Suffers 'Breakdown'

FAMED dowdy rural spinster Jane Austen has lately been committed to a secure institution following her erratic behaviour of recent weeks.

Miss Austen, who has never had any sex at all, is widely regarded as the foremost female author of this age or any before. Of late, however, the ill-favoured, never-been-kissed lady of letters has been behaving erratically, lashing out at members of the media and becoming increasingly aggressive.

The speculation that this is due to such recent headlines in this newspaper as 'Gargoyle Who Writes Like an Angel' or 'Hirsute Hampshire Horror Has Heart of Gold" is unfounded.

Miss Austen, who has been writing quietly for nearly twenty years without achieving success, is understood to be completely unable to cope with any press interest whatsoever.

This paper, which takes no responsibility for her breakdown, would like to wish Miss Austen a speedy recovery and express its displeasure with all the other newspapers which have shown a disgraceful lack of propriety in their coverage of this unsightly bonkers virgin.

King George III has been in contact with Miss Austen and is understood to be very concerned for her well-being, as is her publisher, Mr P. Morgan.

On Other Pages

Austen 'Always Ugly' – *we interview childhood friends*

Byron's Weight Rockets Again – *new lithographs of the lardy lord*

Love Rat Shelley abandons Wife for Weirdo Godwin

THEN

"Sorry Mum, can't talk... I'm just wrapping up a deal... Yah it's a whopper!"

NOW

"Sorry Mum, can't talk... I'm just wrapping up a deal... Yah it's a Whopper!"

BBC Radio 3

Opera Choice

Il Travestiatl by Berlusconi

Act One of the famous *Opera Buffooni* opens with the Robber Baron holding one of his famous parties at the sumptuous Villa Pornograffi.

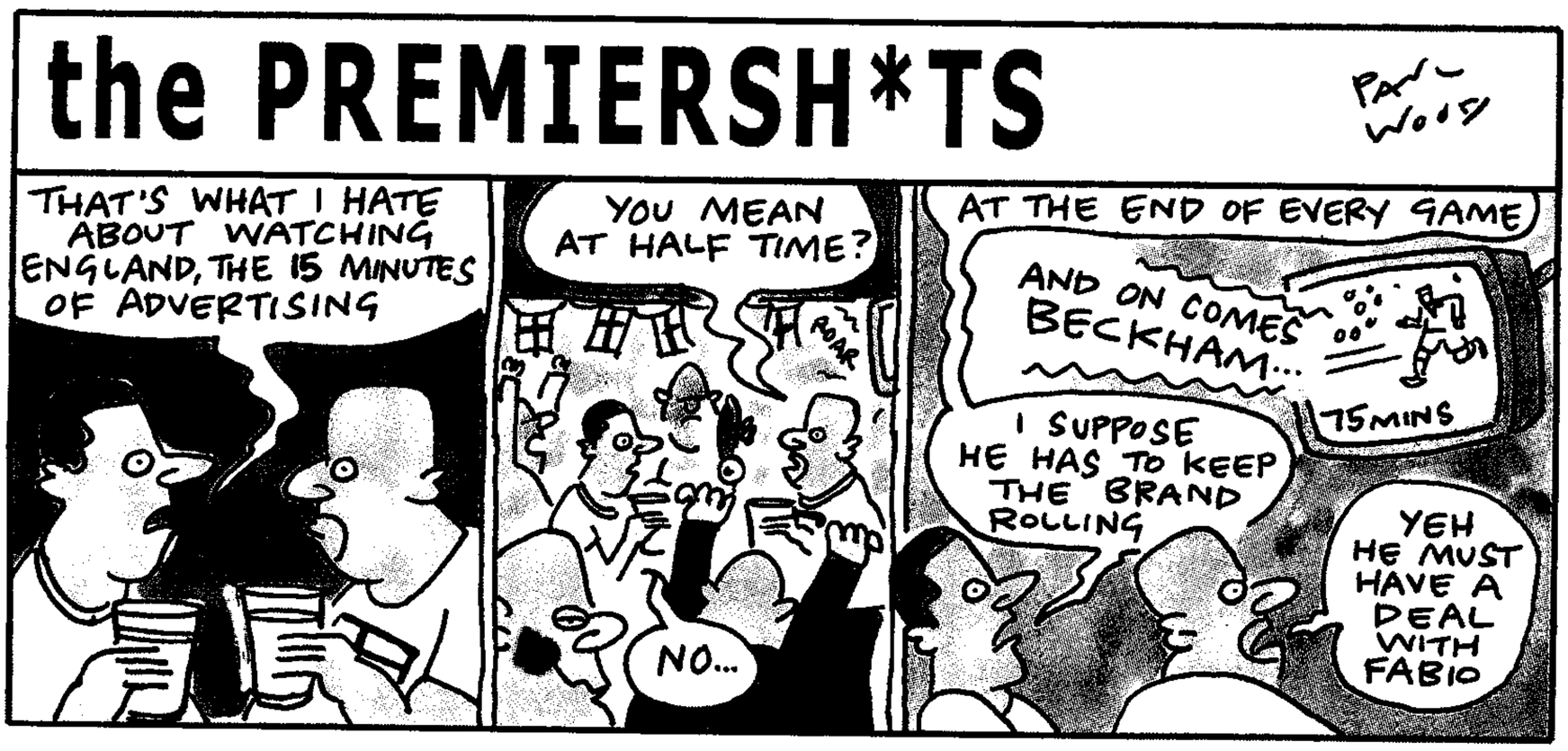
A chorus of semi-naked nymphs urge Silvio to turn up the central heating, singing the haunting aria *Tutti Titti Frizzi (Our Tiny Tits Are Frozen)*.

The festivities are then interrupted by two photographers, Papageno and Paparazzo, who hide in an olive tree in order to take pictures of the frolicking lovelies. The photographers sing *Millione et Tre (We're Going To make A Fortune From These Dirty Pix)*.

Act II The Robber Baron is furious and consults his lawyer, the elderly Pietro Cartero-Fucco, who advises him to pass a privacy law at once, making it illegal to take pictures of the Robber Baron without his trousers *(Surely "consent"? Ed.)*.

Act III Silvio receives an unexpected visitor from England, Sir Maximilian Mosley, who tells him that he must punish the photographers for their intrusions into his private life, preferably by spanking them or whipping him dressed as a German officer.

Silvio laughs and the two of them sing the world-famous *Bums Sorus* from *Aieeeeeda*! *(That's enough Opera on 3. Ed.)*


the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
THAT'S WHAT I HATE ABOUT WATCHING ENGLAND, THE 15 MINUTES OF ADVERTISING
YOU MEAN AT HALF TIME?
NO...
AT THE END OF EVERY GAME
AND ON COMES BECKHAM...
75MINS
I SUPPOSE HE HAS TO KEEP THE BRAND ROLLING
YEH HE MUST HAVE A DEAL WITH FABIO

DIARY

JULIE KAVANAGH: MY LIFE WITH MARTIN AMIS

It was the beginning of 1974 and I was seriously smitten. Martin Amis (or, as he styled himself at that time, Martin: Amis) was everything I had ever wished for: moody, ironic, dishy, and, in his own characteristically brilliant words, "f----ing clever".

He was, again in his own words, a "word-magician in velve" (a reference to his beloved velvet jacket, or "jacky-jack" as he sometimes called it). He had admitted me into his magical circle of brilliant intellectuals like legendary *ecriviste* Anthony Holden, the funny, flirtatious Clive James (whose TV criticism was an art form in itself) and that doyenne of wicked wordplay, Robert Robinson. Sometimes Cyril Fletcher, the eminence grise of television's fabled "That's Life" would grace us with his presence, and, urging us all to "Pin back your lug 'oles" would bring the table to its feet with one of his immortal "Odd Odes".

Martin was then working at the *TLS*, and would sometimes send me love letters he had written on *TLS* notepaper. "I love you Martin" he once wrote. I remember mentioning that he must have left out a dash between the 'you' and the 'Martin', but he denied it. Looking back, that was the first intimation I ever had that he was really in love with someone else.

Surprising as it may seem, the focus of meals in the Amis family was not intimidating, as the focus of the meals was the verbal singles match between father and son, which required appreciative laughter from an outsider, not participation. Kingsley might do his brilliant imitation of a Cockney ("Lor-luvaduck, me old son – any old iron? Cheers, mate!") and, in a flash, Martin would hit back with a similarly brilliant one-liner, delivered in an equally hilarious accent ("Gor blimey O'Reilly, oom-pah-pah, my old dutch!"). Needless to say, all bystanders would soon be in fits.

The image I've retained of nights at home is of me cooking dinner while Martin sits nearby, chuckling away as he rereads his own prose. While I knock up a coq au vin with creamed potatoes and broccoli, he sits there, splitting his sides over one of his most brilliant word-inventions. He was a master of language. "Rig" meant penis, "metal motorway" meant zip, ("Ouch! I've caught my rig in my metal motorway!" exclaims his character Fred Fucker, immortally, in his early novel *Phlegmy Cushions*), "sock" meant house, "bra" meant bar, "bar" meant car, "car" meant bra, and "baa" was the noise a sheep made.

Friday lunch would always be spent with his circle, each sparring to outwit the others with their brilliants *mots justes* (thirty years later, a walk-on Nazi character in his dystopian novel "Stalin's Hitler" was in fact called Mo Juice). Christopher Hitchens – universally known as "The Hitch" (he recently revealed that this was a reference to the first syllable of his surname) – would also be there. He remembers Martin as always being the centre of attention. "He used to do a genius imitation of Frank Spencer, the neo-Beckettian anti-hero of "Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em" " he now recalls. "Martin used to place this beret low down on his forehead, and then say in his expertly modulated, brilliantly high-pitched voice, 'Oooh, Betty!' Needless to say, we'd all fall about."

This was what it must have been like to have been around the table in Magny's Restaurant in 1860s Paris, with Turgenev, Flaubert and Zola. Some of the conversations they had are still imprinted on my mind. Talk would range from Shakespeare's Globe (which Martin referred to, memorably, as "Shagspeer's Gob") to passionate and informed condemnations of Adolf Hitler ("the guy was a Nazi").

I didn't know then that this was a golden era: that each player would become a star in his own right, and eventually an elder statesman. The Hitch would take America by storm with his iconoclastic opinions and Robert Robinson would chair "Brain of Britain" with a wit and bravura that was to turn him into a legend. By the summer of 1975, Martin had become as famous as his father, and his feelings of profound unattractiveness and physical inadequacy (I remember him taking a step-ladder to parties, just in case he bumped into someone taller, like Dr Jonathan Miller) had given way to a Byronic magnetism. When he left a room, pieces of metal filings would stick to him.

Suddenly, the whole of literary London yearned to go to bed with him. For the next six months, I would spot tell-tale signs all over the place: Germaine Greer's headband on the hatstand, Andrea Dworkin's thong beside the fur rug, William Golding's beret on the bedside table. But I never suspected what was going on. I suppose I really only twigged that things were getting out of hand when I walked into our bedroom and found Martin naked in bed with a young woman who didn't seem to have had a book recently published. This was going too far, even for Martin. When I questioned her, she insisted she had written one, but I could find no evidence for it.

There was a heatwave that summer; it brought with it an oppressive air of foreboding. I suppose we both knew then that this was the end. His notes to me from this period until the end of the year were, I now realise, nearly all alibis. "Popped out for pack of fags. Back late tomorrow" reads one of them , and another reads "Off to complete new novel. Probably finish it early Mon. Taken toothbrush and clean pr of pants and two bots. of Lambrusco and pk of cndms for literary reasons you wdn't undrstnd bcs you didn't go to Oxford." I wish I had known then what I know now. Today, it strikes me that he must have been playing on my feelings of inadequacy for never having gone to Oxford.

He dumped me for my best friend, Emma Soames, because her grandfather was Winston Churchill. He had her on the beaches, he had her on the landing grounds, he had her on the fields and in the streets, he had her on the hills. It was the heady pull of an aristocratic world that drew Charles Ryder to Brideshead, and I could not compete.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

WITH PLAYERS LIKE ERIC CLAPTON, BILL WYMAN AND BARRY GIBB, THE BUNBURY CRICKET CLUB IS LEGENDARY...
I CAN'T WAIT TO PLAY THEM. IT'S A CHARITY MATCH BUT I'LL BE VERY COMPETITIVE. AS WICKET KEEPER I'LL BE DOING LOADS OF SLEDGING...
AH YES SIR..
MAKING COMMENTS ABOUT THE BATSMAN'S ABILITIES TO PUT THEM OFF THEIR GAME...
ABSOLUTELY.
YOUR LAST CONCERT WAS CRAP, CLAPTON. YOU CAN'T PLAY GUITAR FOR TOFFEE...

Literary Review

Winter of discontent

The Winter Vault
Anne Michaels
(Bloomsbury, £16.99)

ANNE MICHAELS won the Orange Prize with her first novel, *Fugitive Pieces*, in 1997, which also won the Guardian fiction prize and has recently been made into a film. Though she has since produced another volume of verse (her third), it has taken her more than a decade to produce another novel. A glance at the acknowledgements in the back of *The Winter Vault* may explain why.

"Many histories of Egypt, Sudan, Abu Simbel, Poland and the St Lawrence Seaway were consulted during the writing of this novel," she begins, ominously. It is the combination of her poetic sensibility and all that regurgitated research that make this such an intensely annoying book. Reading it feels like a long journey taken in tiny steps going nowhere. The novel is told in short, bitty snippets of a few hundred words each that jump about in time and place, avoiding the risk of developing anything so vulgar as strong narrative drive or page-turning suspense. But these are the very qualities that will no doubt put it in the running for at least one of this year's literary awards.

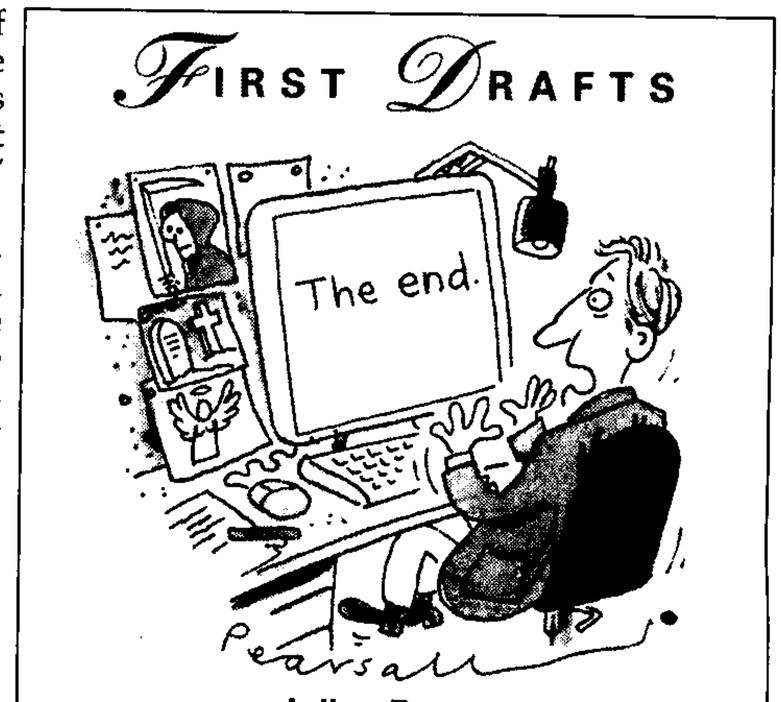
At the heart of the book, or at its "innermost core" as Michaels would poetically describe it, is the relationship between Avery, an English engineer, and his young Canadian wife Jean. It's the mid-1960s. Avery is in Egypt working on the Aswan Dam project. He supervises the dismantling and reconstruction in another location of the Great Temple of Abu Simbel, a historic monument that would otherwise be submerged under the waters when the dam is completed. Jean is a botanist whom Avery has met in Canada while working on the construction of the St Lawrence Seaway, which like the Aswan Dam has involved the forced displacement of thousands of people from towns and villages which would later be submerged. Through Jean's somewhat morbid gaze, we see the displacements as a form of exile and worry about the dead whose graves will be submerged as well, and about the graceful Nubians who have had to be resettled somewhere unsuitable.

Jean is pregnant but the child dies within her and is stillborn. Jean observes: "My body is a grave." They go back to Canada but her grief drives her apart from Avery, and in Montreal she falls into the arms and bed of Lucjan, a Polish refugee artist who regales her (and us) with tales of life in the Warsaw ghetto during the Nazi occupation and the reconstruction of the old centre of Warsaw during the subsequent Soviet era. Clearly there is a parallel between the replica rebuilding of old Warsaw and the reconstruction of the Great Temple at Abu Simbel, just as there are parallels between the various deaths and exiles and displacements in Canada and Egypt, but it's all rather forced.

The key phrase occurs on page 123: "No two facts are too far apart to be put together." Applying this principle, Michaels throws everything in together, the personal, the political, the scientific and the sentimental, hoping it will somehow "connect" and resonate. But the result is a far from seamless patchwork of somewhat morbid preoccupations. A lot of this ground (the death, exile, guilt stuff) was covered in the earlier novel, which concerned a Jewish refugee from war-torn Poland who emigrates to Canada. (Indeed, the Warsaw section of the present book looks like a convenient way of using up some of the left-over material from that earlier project.)

The writing is self-consciously "beautiful" and "poetic" throughout, which means there are lots of sentences along the lines of "Everything we are can be contained in a voice, passing forever into silence," or "When your arm is in the water, you are part of it; when you pull it out, there is no trace of you left behind." Yeah, right. With platitudes like these, we are almost in Paulo Coelho territory. Or dipping into the cracker barrel for some fortune cookie wisdom. At other times the portentousness of it all teeters on the verge of hilarity: we are told, for example, that "the Great Temple had been carved out of the very light of the river, carved out of a profound belief in eternity". (It is made of stone.) But perhaps that is just the "ancient language of builders" (whatever that means).

One shouldn't laugh. Poets win prizes and Michaels is a poet. She has a reputation to live up to, and that is perhaps a burden. One just wishes she wouldn't try so hard, or try to cram so much in, or be so heroically melancholic and wistful all the time. Hey, lighten up! Or as Avery might have said to Jean, frankly my dear, I don't give an Aswan.



BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ "THIS is the hell our troops endured to liberate your country, Mr Sarkozy," screamed the *Daily Mail* headline above an extract from Antony Beevor's new book about D-Day.

The standfirst warmed to this theme of perfidious Frogs: "After the shambolic failure to invite the Queen to next week's D-Day anniversary, one of our finest historians reveals the almost unimaginable horror Allied soldiers faced as they fought to free France from the grip of Hitler's most bloodthirsty and fanatical stormtroopers."

Yet nowhere in the entire 3,000-word article was there a single mention of Sarkozy's so-called snub. The hysterical and misleading francophobic embellishments had been added on the personal orders of Paul Dacre.

Antony Beevor was incandescent when he saw the published version, not least because he then had to explain it away to the executives of a French TV channel who had hired him to do a D-Day commentary – and to the French ambassador in London, who had graciously agreed to host the book's launch party. Beevor instantly demanded – and got – a written apology from Dacre. He has subsequently withdrawn from a speaking engagement at the *Daily Mail*'s Literary Lunch, is sending his fee to charity and swears he'll never write for the *Mail* again.

■ SARAH WATERS' *The Little Stranger* offers a pattern example of the way in which publication of a novel by a literary A-lister soon transforms itself into a marketing exercise pure and simple.

The participants in this spirited collusion were the Virago publicity department, the *Guardian* newspaper group and, to a slightly lesser extent, messrs Waterstone's.

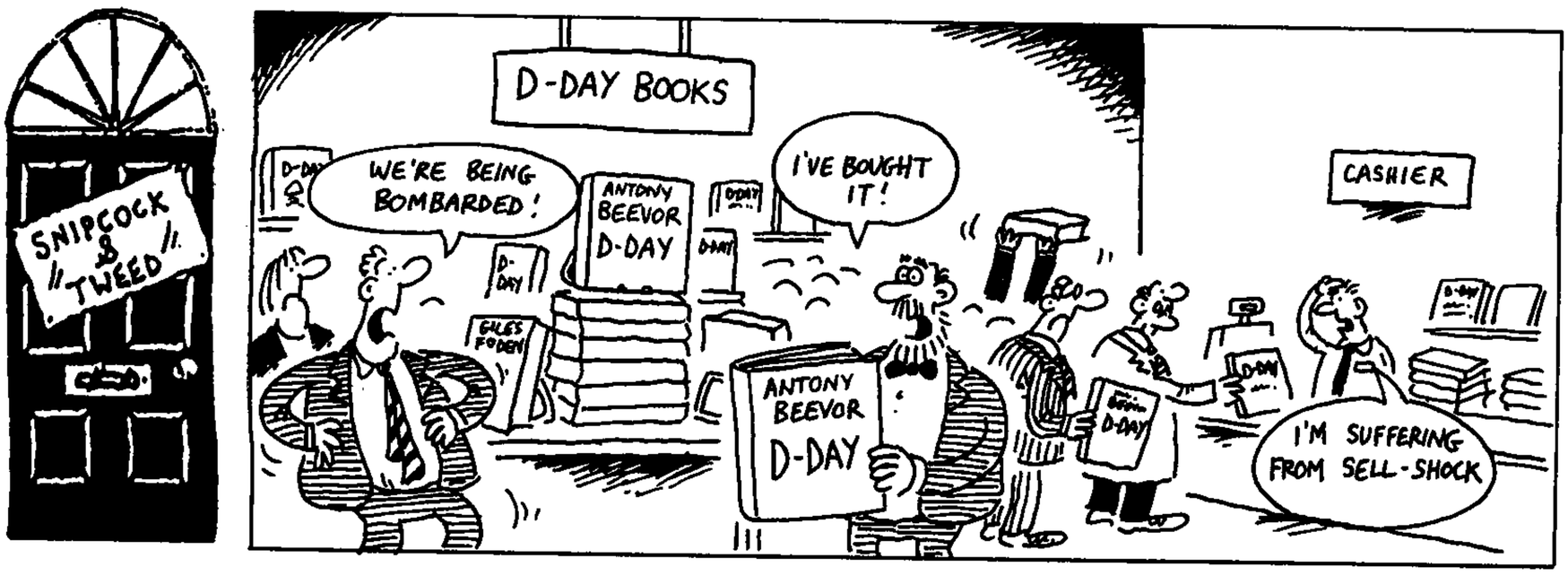
The ball was set rolling with an admiring profile by Robert McCrum (comparisons with Daphne du Maurier and so on) in the *Observer*. Meanwhile, *la* Waters featured as a star attraction at Hay (sponsors, the *Guardian*) and was subsequently encouraged to write at length about the book in, coincidentally enough, the *Guardian Saturday Review*. Waterstone's obligingly chipped in with a half-price promotion, thereby attracting extra custom from independent bookshops by undercutting the latter's suppliers.

One slight anxiety attended these elaborate stratagems. What if the novel wasn't any good? Happily Hilary Mantel could be found assuring *Guardian* readers that it was a triumph, thus making it worth Virago's while to book a full-page ad in the following Saturday's edition featuring encomia from... you guessed, the *Guardian* and the *Observer*. Meanwhile, from other reviewers – for example Sean O'Brien in the *TLS* – comes a faint suspicion that *The Little Stranger* a) goes on a bit and b) is a touch dull in places. But no, Virago and the kind people at the *Guardian* will have their masterpiece: so much time and money has been invested, you see, that any other outcome would be a profound embarrassment to everyone concerned.

■ ANOTHER feature of the early-summer publishing season has been a gaggle of newspaper articles assuring us that home-grown novelists have lost sight of the reality of life in 21st century Britain.

Amanda Craig took up a whole two pages of the *Independent* back in April to complain that practically every serious novel published this year has an historical theme, while the *Independent on Sunday* of 31 May offered a 2,000 word jeremiad by Tim Lott suggesting that "English literature has lost touch with an important part of its function: to tell us who we are, where we are going and to help us understand our lives."

As literary trend-spotting goes this is, of course, the purest



nonsense. For a start, numbers of the writers now delighting the public with historical fiction – Hilary Mantel and A.S. Byatt for instance – have previously set their work in the here and now. Then again, the last couple of years have brought half-a-dozen "state of the nation" novels, as they used to be called, from Blake Morrison's *South of the River* (Blair's Britain 1997-2005) to Richard T. Kelly's *Crusaders* and Philip Hensher's Booker-shortlisted *The Northern Clemency*. So what are Amanda and Tim on about? At the heart of these laments, alas, lurks some discreet, or not so-discreet, self-promotion. For Tim, it turns out, in such novels as *Rumours of a Hurricane* (Mrs Thatcher's legacy) and *The Seymour Tapes* (the surveillance society) is a here and now merchant. And Amanda's new one, *Hearts and Minds*, as she hastened to assure readers of the *Independent* at inordinate length, just happens to be a Dickensian take on contemporary London.

■ THOUGH not always expertly coordinated (two TS Eliot films?) and sometimes overindulgent of celebrity egos (*Simon Schama's John Donne*?!), the BBC's poetry season has been a rich banquet.

Once the dirty plates are cleared away after this bulimic binge, however, it'll be back to the fasting that's the scandalous reality of the Beeb's TV books coverage for most of the year. With no dedicated programme despite three available channels, writers vie for slots in Alan Yentob's idiosyncratic BBC1 multi-arts series *Imagine* and BBC2's dismal, bitty *Culture Show*. The former screened just three author profiles last year and none in 2007; while the latter is presented by a DJ and a film critic, for whom books are clearly not a priority.

"But we sponsor and broadcast the Samuel Johnson prize," executives sheepishly protest; yes, and the prize money has tellingly been cut this year and coverage of the ceremony has been banished to BBC2's post-*Newsnight* slot.

■ WITH Richard and Judy off the sofa and *The South Bank Show* ending next year, Mariella Frostrup's rivals are vanishing fast.

She presents not only TV's only specialist books programme, *The Book Show* on Sky Arts, but also *Open Book*, Radio 4's only series about current books (and no one seems able to object if the same writers appear on both); she is the queen of the Hay festival, when *The Book Show* becomes the daily chat show *Hay on Sky*; and she presents the Costa awards, which shares its sponsor with the Sky plugfest. When Melvyn Bragg goes, the Mariella monopoly will be unchallenged.

But the authors she flirtatiously quizzes may wonder how much she values them on seeing an advert Sky ran during Hay in which she was asked to name her favourite guests. The Nobel laureates and Booker winners? Nope. "So far I've interviewed one prime minister [Gordon Brown], one prime minister's wife [Cherie Blair] and one ex-president (Jimmy Carter). When Obama finally makes it, I'll happily retire." So much for literature.

■ TWO philosophers are wrestling with a novel conundrum: is the *Sunday Times* trying to incite a jihad against them?

"An academic book about religious attitudes to women is to be published this week," the paper declared of Ophelia Benson and Jeremy Stangroom's *Does God Hate Women?*, "despite concerns it could cause a backlash among Muslims because it criticises the prophet Muhammad for taking a nine-year-old girl as his third wife."

It is indeed a powerful book which examines the abuse of women in the name of Islam and other major religions. Benson and Stangroom, who write for the *Philosophers' Magazine*, lay into largely white intellectuals who dismiss child abuse and misogyny in traditional religious cultures they would never tolerate in their own.

The "book may cause a backlash", warned the *Sunday Times*; but only alert readers noticed that it did not say who was threatening to lead a backlash. "Such assertions could invoke the ire of some Muslims", it continued. Which Muslims?

The paper left the whole question of who had contacted journalists and warned that the book would cause a violent response hanging in the air. Er, no one was the answer. Christine Toomey, of the *Sunday Times*, created a controversy where none existed.

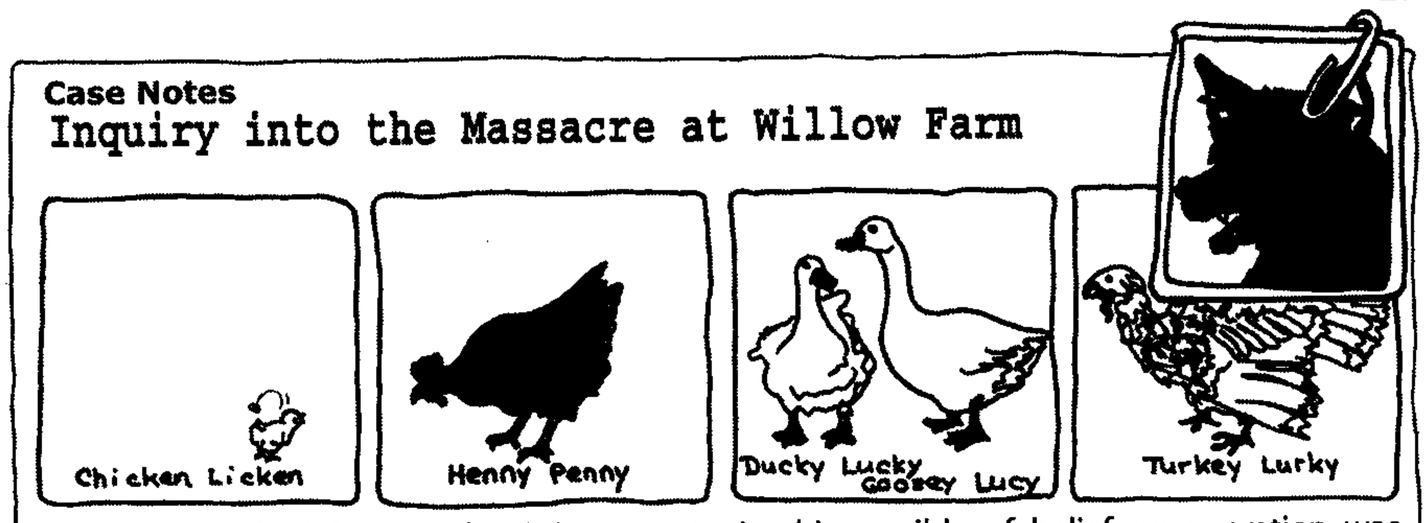
She phoned the publisher before the book was out, and told him that in her opinion it might cause offence. The panicked publisher then called in an "ecumenical adviser" who said he couldn't see anything wrong with it. Desperate but undaunted, the *Sunday Times* searched around and finally came up with bonkers extremist Anjem Choudary, former leader of the banned Al-Muhajiroun. He duly condemned *Does God Hate Women?* as he would duly condemn anything else.

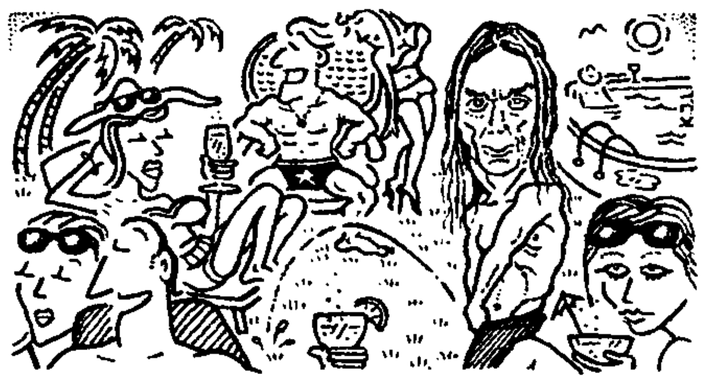
"Talk of Aisha as a child when she married is not true," he said, as he delivered his expert views on female sexuality. "At nine she reached her menses and in those days a girl was considered to be mature when that happened. No one will swallow talk about child brides. It would lead to a huge backlash, as we saw with *The Jewel of Medina*."

Random House backed off from publishing Sherry Jones' historical novel on the life of Aisha, after American academic Denise Spellberg launched a frantic attack on it. Spellberg saw a proof of *The Jewel of Medina* and decided to "warn Muslims that it made fun of Muslims and their history". When Gibson Square, a small London publisher, picked up the novel, three Muslim extremists tried to firebomb the home of its publisher.

Writers all over the world condemned Spellberg. They said it was outrageous that academics should undermine freedom of speech when their livelihoods depended on it. Now journalists, who need freedom of speech just as badly, are playing the same game.

'Bookworm'


Case Notes
Inquiry into the Massacre at Willow Farm
Chicken Licken
Henny Penny
Ducky Lucky
Goosey Lucy
Turkey Lurky
In the aftermath of the tragedy it is important to understand the group dynamic which drove this previously stable society to destruction. The initial incident – a pea on the head of Chicken Licken – was misinterpreted as an apocalyptic event. The child's testimony carried such weight that the elders were informed. Many opinions were sought but as is usual with vox pox the value was paltry.
In this crucible of belief, an operation was planned to leave their safe borders and to seek a higher authority. The group were found to be open to suggestion and subject to mass hysteria. They valued conviction over information and this ultimately lead to their brutal deaths.
Literary Psychologist



While conducting *The Word* around his beguiling Florida property, Iggy stops to have a nice big slash on the lawn. It's a gorgeous, sun-flushed afternoon. Bare-chested and freshly showered, he makes no effort to step away from his guests as he unzips his jeans and decants onto the grass. Iggy's comfort break is undertaken unselfconsciously, without the slightest desire to shock or amaze. Rather, it's oddly charming, reprising the easy nonchalance with which he's long addressed the corporeal.

ROY WILKINSON interviews IGGY POP, *The Word*

We are seeking to appoint the role [sic] at Horsley Mill to undertake all cleaning duties.

To undertake this position successfully, you will need to embrace, articulate and work with the Trust's spiritual architecture and clean to a very high standard using the environmentally friendly products provided.

Job advert for a cleaner placed by Ruskin Mill College

Chisholm does thoughtful justice to ten decades of literary life, with few lapses (though, since others have made the same mistake, I would like to place on record that Stanley Olson's dog was named Oiseau and not Wuzzo as she erroneously asserts on page 303).

VIRGINIA NICOLSON reviews Anne Chisholm's biography of Frances Partridge, *The Times*

Shakespeare's tragedy is the inescapable consequence of a flaw in a person's personality; witness Macbeth's demise. Transposed to Tyneside, this could be the potentially ruinous relegation of Newcastle United to the Coca-Cola Championship this coming weekend.

BRIAN MOORE, *Daily Telegraph*

Zebra Crossings. They're just so deliciously melodramatic as a design concept.

EMILY MAITLIS's Loves and Hates, *Sunday Telegraph*

Banish white silk lampshades. I hate them – so bourgeois. Instead, I like to cover mine in brown paper and write little messages on them with a Japanese brush.

INES DE LA FRESSANGE, *Sunday Times Style* Section

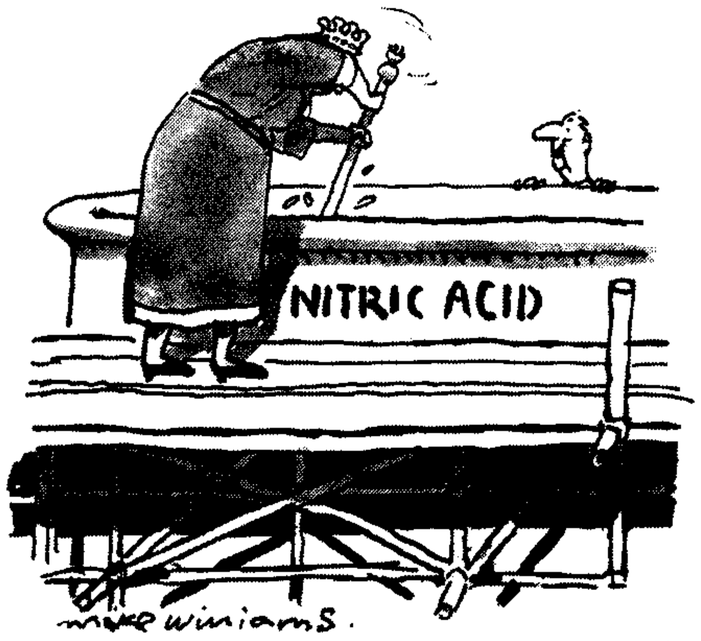
CONTRIBUTORS: M. Solan, Alastair Mitchell, L. Lavery, Danny Clayton, Rosie Mackinnon, Clara Farmer.

£10 paid for all entries

Pseuds Corner

*"Nonsense, man! Of course you're entitled to put down **all** of Dorset"*

"Sales are slow today"



"Thinking of dissolving parliament, Your Majesty?"

*"You are not going out dressed like **that**, young lady!"*

EXXON AND THE LAWYER: AN EXPLOSIVE TALE

MICHAEL FORD bitterly regrets the day he decided to take oil giant Exxon's corporate shilling. It was to turn him from a successful criminal barrister operating in Hong Kong to a penniless bankrupt, his reputation destroyed. And all, he says, because he crossed the corporation and refused to suppress vital evidence in his possession.

His prolonged David and Goliath fight with Exxon to clear his name has zigzagged the globe from Hong Kong to the US, Australia and to the Privy Council in London. It has consumed 17 years of his life; but even now, aged 67, Ford (pictured above) is not giving up.

Fatally volatile mix

It all started with a powerful explosion at Hong Kong's huge coal-fired Castle Peak power station on the Kowloon Waterfront in August 1992. Two engineers died and 19 others were injured. The power station was owned and managed by an Exxon subsidiary; and Ford was approached to represent it at the inquest into the engineers' deaths.

The coroner, a no-nonsense New Zealand lawyer called Warner Banks, alerted by local police that Exxon and its subsidiary were refusing to hand over all internal documents into the disaster, had sought assurances from Ford that everything would be forthcoming. But Exxon, it seems, had other ideas.

According to papers lodged in later court proceedings, Ford had been given two internal reports. A 600-page "blue" report revealed failures in maintenance, training and operation of the plant. Coupled with engineering reports and annexes, it gave some support to the independent conclusion of the Hong Kong Fire Service that a worn fitting, not changed since the station was built seven years earlier, had allowed air into one of the tanks storing hydrogen, causing a fatally volatile mix.

'Charges of a cover-up'

The second, much shorter "red" report conveniently left out anything which indicated fault on the part of the subsidiary or Exxon, which suggested the explosion was caused by water seeping undetected into underground pipes.

Ford was emphatic that the blue report had to be disclosed, causing one of the corporation's Hong Kong lawyers to report to Exxon: "The problem of the blue report is a difficult one. To put it bluntly we are damned if it is disclosed and damned if it is not." The blue report also made reference to a third "Exxon" report of which the lawyer wrote: "Our concern... is to avoid references to their [Exxon's] role in the investigative process. This is to reduce the possibility that the families of the deceased will sufficiently appreciate the involvement of Exxon and the possibility of obtaining higher punitive damages in the United States."

Ford also had a memo from Exxon's expert, Dr Richard Jack, which said they were "at fault" for failing to prevent air entering the system; failing to carry out annual checks; and for failures in the safety alarms and trip systems. Jack noted that they "seem to have conveniently lost documentation on some fairly critical issues" and warned: "We shall need to be careful to avoid charges of cover-up." A hand-written report from a maintenance superintendent also confirmed that no internal inspection of the hydrogen tanks had been carried out for at least three years.

Part way into the inquest and before Ford had made any reference to it, the blue report went missing from his courtroom bundle. He reported the loss to the coroner and at a crisis meeting with Exxon's lawyers, sought to withdraw from the case. He claims he was threatened that he wouldn't work in Hong Kong again if he were perceived as a "quitter". He was given a new copy of the blue report, which he later noted had been altered to take out all reference to Exxon, and its status reduced to "advisory", rather than conclusive.

'Model' corporate citizen

Ford sought professional help from the Hong Kong Bar council about what he should do, but says he was sacked three hours before the advice came through. Exxon's case has always been that Ford was sacked for lying to his clients about his dealings with the Bar Council and it has maintained throughout that his claims are nothing more than "fantasy, speculation and innuendo".

New lawyers handled the inquest and in June 1993 a verdict of accidental death was returned by the jury. The following year, in the Hong Kong magistrates' court, the Exxon subsidiary was fined a nominal HK$4,000 (£350) for a technical breach of a factory law. In mitigation it said the company "prides itself on being a 'model' corporate citizen of Hong Kong."

The fight goes to America

Ford had made enemies in the colony, but he still had influential friends abroad. The following month, the crusading US lawyer Stuart Speiser took up his case. Speiser promptly issued a writ in Texas against Exxon, subsidiary companies, and one of its lawyers, Robert Brown, accusing them of a cover-up and the subsequent malicious wrecking of Ford's career. At the heart of the case were reports and documentation Ford had retained or copied from the inquest.

Retaliation was swift. Exxon obtained an ex-parte injunction in Hong Kong banning Ford from discussing or passing on company information. Ford returned from a holiday in France to fight the claim for breach of confidence, but says police warned him to leave the colony for his own safety and escorted him to the airport. Another barrister, Jerome Matthews, swore an affidavit naming two policemen who had said "there were fears for the safety of Mr Ford and that he was to be given a police escort and assistance to pack his belongings and leave Hong Kong forthwith". Ford has never been back, believing he would face jail, intimidation or worse.

Claims of a cover-up hit the Hong Kong press; and under public pressure, the colony's attorney-general ordered a new inquest. The coroner, Warner Banks, ordered the production of documents highlighted in press reports, and this time the jury returned a "lack of care" verdict. However, in January 1994, Exxon successfully challenged the legal basis for the new verdict. It was quashed and the two engineers' deaths remain unforeseen "accidents". But the coroner, even then, had not seen all the relevant evidence about the blast.

Exxon's meddling

In the meantime Ford was pursued through the Hong Kong courts, Exxon claiming the UK equivalent of £2.3m for breach of confidentiality, and obtaining a court order freezing his assets. After seeking advice in the UK, he decided to apply for voluntary bankruptcy; his appearance at Swindon bankruptcy court, utterly humiliating.

Penniless, he applied for legal aid to help him contest the case brought against him in Hong Kong. But thanks to Exxon's meddling, he was turned down. The company's lawyers had informed the Hong Kong legal aid board that Ford's claims of penury were a sham. They said he had recently acted in a high court case in London. In fact that was another barrister called Michael Ford, which a simple check would have revealed.

Michael Beloff QC, later representing Exxon at

the Privy Council in London, was to say this had been "an unfortunate error" which "was not done with any malice". Whatever the truth, the effect was deeply damaging. Without legal representation and too fearful to return to Hong Kong, Ford was ordered by the Hong Kong courts to pay the equivalent of around £30,000 for breach of confidence. The original freezing order for £2.3m was declared "oppressive". In Ford's absence, the Hong Kong judge said he accepted Exxon's claim that there was no truth whatsoever in his allegations of a cover-up. It was all a "figment of his imagination" and his actions had been "disgraceful".

Ford appealed, but without even looking at his written submissions and evidence, the higher court dismissed his case.

All battles in the colony exhausted, Ford concentrated on his lawsuit against Exxon in the US and began moves in London to challenge the Hong Kong rulings in the Privy Council – the final court of appeal for the colonies. Crucial to both was Warner Banks. The coroner himself had also lost his job in Hong Kong after the controversial inquests, over what were perceived to be trumped-up charges of breaching the terms of his state-funded tenancy by living with his girlfriend, later his wife.

Ford traced Banks to his native New Zealand and showed him all the material he held on the explosion. Banks was stunned. He swore an affidavit on Ford's behalf, which was dynamite. The evidence he had now seen led him to conclude: "There is evidence of gross negligence which, in my view, would have necessitated me leaving to the inquest jury a possible verdict of manslaughter or unlawful killing for their consideration."

Retaliation was again swift. Exxon threatened Banks with an action for libel, unless he retracted his affidavit, maintaining that all evidence had been made available at the second inquest. Banks was furious and complained to the Hong Kong police that he regarded the solicitors' letters as a "threat to a prospective prosecution witness".

Banks' testimony caused great excitement among those now working on Ford's behalf both in the US and on the Privy Council challenge in London – the law firm Irwin Mitchell

Frigging hell... it's Irwin Mitchell

Back in March 1994, the American attorney Stu Speiser had introduced Ford to Michael Napier, a friend and senior partner at Irwin Mitchell. Ford sent Napier (pictured right) some initial paper-work, including, he says, the initial US writ against Exxon and its subsidiaries, including Esso. Napier wrote saying he was horrified by what he had read and heard and suggested a meeting. It was the beginning of an extraordinary relationship with Napier's firm, which officially started working on Ford's behalf, pro bono, in March 1996, with partner Ellen Windsor assigned to the case.

As the last *Eye* reported, Windsor had introduced Ford to her fiancé, a mysterious "Colonel" Colin Pritchard, said to be ex-SAS and an engineer with government contacts. Michael Heseltine, then deputy prime minister, was said to be interested in the case because the UK was shortly to hand Hong Kong over to China, and he did not want any "embarrassments". Ford was taken in by a letter from Windsor promising supper with Heseltine.

But Pritchard turned out to be a fraud. Several years later Ford was to discover that he had never served in any armed forces, and had no contact with Heseltine, who knew nothing of Ford's troubles in Hong Kong.

Initially, however, "Col" Pritchard seemed an asset. He went to Hong Kong to investigate and put together an "expert" report on the explosion at the plant for Irwin Mitchell. It described how alarm systems, which should have alerted the company to a potentially lethal gas leak, had been by-passed. The report alleged this cross-wiring, or "frigging" of alarms was common practice to keep the plant running until proper maintenance could be carried out. Pritchard's report concluded that if alarms and trips had not been "frigged", and there had been regular maintenance inspections, there would have been no fatal explosion.

Victim of intimidation

Pritchard also tracked down one David Ford (no relation), an English engineer on the plant at the time who was prepared to give a statement on Michael Ford's behalf, confirming the cross-wiring and lack of regular maintenance at the power station. Together with Banks' testimony, Ford believed he had proof of his claims of a cover-up, which would both boost his civil litigation in the US, and lead to the quashing of the case against him in Hong Kong in the Privy Council.

How wrong he was. Ford was told that Pritchard could not be used as an expert because of his sensitive connections with government. David Ford was also backtracking, saying he had received warnings from old colleagues in Hong Kong. Thus, Napier concluded in a letter to Ford, Pritchard's report was to be used only "as a background document to assist our explanation of the true technical details of the explosion and the 'cover-up'."

Pritchard and Windsor were also to deliver another blow. They had been claiming that Windsor was the victim of intimidation as a direct result of her being involved in Ford's case. They said there had been mysterious burglaries at her home, tampering with her car, theft of her passport and the sighting of "Chinese"-looking men following her. Windsor was later to write to Napier of the "continuous threats" and suggested the costs of "security cover" and damage repair were up to £70,000. Ford wanted the issue of intimidation of his solicitor raised in the Privy Council, in order to persuade the judges to decide the appeal themselves, and not refer it back to Hong Kong. But in the absence of signed statements from the pair, there was no proof. Ford also agreed with advice not to raise the issue before the appeal, lest Exxon seize on the claim of intimidation to delay the case, by which time the colony would have passed into Chinese hands and out of UK jurisdiction.

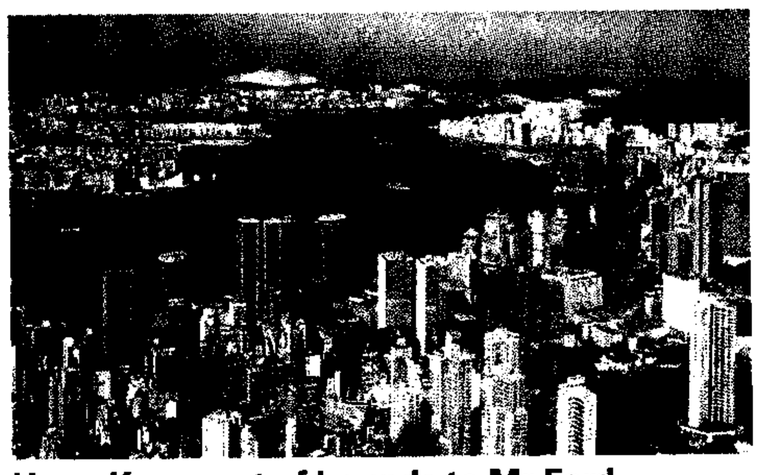
Thus in April 1997 Ford's appeal in the Privy Council was allowed to the extent that Exxon had conceded that the Hong Kong appeal judges had not properly considered Ford's written submissions and it was sent back to Hong Kong for consideration. Michael Napier, in newspaper reports of his recent costly legal efforts to gag the *Eye* (see last issue), presented the Privy Council hearing as a victory for Ford. But at the time he said it would have been "catastrophic if the appeal was substantially successful but results in him (Ford) being thrown back to Hong Kong where he would face not only an impossible struggle to obtain justice, but also personal risk". And so it turned out Ford lost the appeal in Hong Kong.

A disaster Down Under

At least Ford's lawsuit in the US appeared to be progressing well. It received a boost in 1999 when allegations of a remarkably similar cover-up following an explosion at another Exxon power plant – Longford in Melbourne, Australia – surfaced at a subsequent royal commission. That inquiry heard how Exxon had produced two reports into the disaster, which had killed two and injured eight. The first would not have seen the light of day, it was argued, had the Melbourne coroner not sent police straight to the company offices to seize data from company computers.

In Australia, Exxon was eventually fined $2m for 11 breaches of the occupational health and safety act and was heavily criticised for originally trying to blame individual workers for the disaster.

An investigation by the *Sydney Morning Herald* linked both the Longford and Hong Kong disasters with two others involving Exxon: a serious water pollution case in the Virgin Islands and another fatal explosion in Aruba in the Dutch Antilles – where there were similar court allegations of non-disclosure and concealing evidence. Ford's American lawyer, Stu Speiser, alleged that these established a pattern of behaviour on the part of Exxon which



Hong Kong: out of bounds to Mr Ford

seemed to support Ford's claims of a cover-up.

Exxon eventually agreed out of court settlements in these cases. Unfortunately, it has not settled with Ford and in 2003 succeeded in thwarting his US case. It won a startling ruling in the American appeal courts that the UK was a more suitable venue to decide Ford's claims – even though Exxon was a US company and most witnesses were there.

It was another bitter knock back for Ford who did not have the resources to start a new claim, in another country, all over again – as Exxon well knew.

Conflicts of interest

There the saga might have ended. But in the summer of 2003, the *Eye* wrote about Ford's struggles with Exxon. It prompted a reader to contact the magazine saying that at the time Napier was handling Ford's case, others at his firm, Irwin Mitchell, were acting for Esso, another Exxon subsidiary, in a very bloody and protracted multi-million pound battle with service station franchisees throughout the country. A Channel 4 documentary at the time revealed how petrol station licence holders were being driven to bankruptcy and worse as Esso sought to increase its profit margins from the stations. The reader had been one of the "victims".

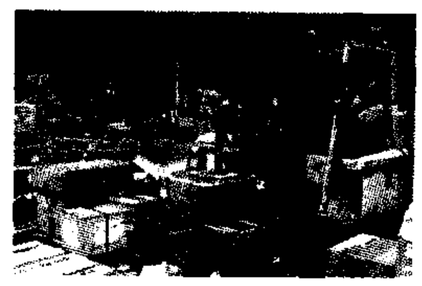
In fact Irwin Mitchell had been working for Esso ever since 1994 (about the time Napier first met Ford), after the law firm merged with another, Kershaw Tudor of Sheffield. For Ford, the fact that Windsor and Napier had not disclosed a lucrative contract with his opponents, cast a whole new light on his case. As reported in the last *Eye*, he said he suddenly realised that all the solicitors in the Privy Council, including his own, had connections to Exxon.

Ford immediately filed a petition to the Privy Council, and subsequently a detailed complaint to the Law Society alleging, among other things, a serious conflict of interest. Some complaints centred on Pritchard and his and Ellen Windsor's company, Dragon International. Windsor had blurred the distinction between the two companies, and although she and Irwin Mitchell were working pro bono, clearly they were hoping for huge rewards should Ford have succeeded in his US case. When it looked like settlement talks were in the offing, Windsor – much to Ford's shock – suggested Dragon and Irwin Mitchell would expect about £750,000 each. As Ford wrote to his American lawyer, three-quarters of a million for a "frigging" report he couldn't use was astounding.

We now know of course that Napier and Windsor were both eventually reprimanded by the Law Society for breaching conflict of interest rules over Exxon/Esso, although the Law Society found this had not affected the conduct of the Privy Council appeal. Windsor was also deemed to have a further conflict over Dragon International.

Napier had said he was unaware at the time that another partner was acting for Esso, but that he wouldn't in any event have connected that with Exxon and Ford's case. Windsor's claim, however, was somewhat different. She suggested a conflict check was done which came back negative. Interestingly, what purports to be a case note from Ford's Irwin Mitchell file, which has only recently come to light, does indeed flag up a potential conflict with both Esso and Exxon. But who saw it and what action was taken is not known. No doubt its significance, if any, will form part of the new investigation into the penalties imposed for the breaches, ordered by the ombudsman. Watch this space.

IN THE BACK



DEFENCE LOGISTICS

Pass the privatised parcel

THE glee of Bob Ainsworth (*pictured above*) at becoming defence secretary will not have lasted long before the first problem landed on his desk.

The suspension of the men in charge of the crucial job of storing and distributing defence equipment for the armed forces, recently revealed in parliament as part of an investigation by the defence fraud analysis unit, does not augur well for government plans to commercialise a host of services under its "operational efficiency review" (see *Eye* 1235).

The fraud investigation is believed to centre on the way contracts have been awarded by Neil Firth, chief executive of the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency (DSDA), and Tim Gall, its corporate services director, following a radical shake-up of the organisation after Firth's appointment from parcels company UPS in April 2006. Its findings are awaited.

Firth's first move was to get rid of most of DSDA's senior civil servants, replacing them with executives from the world of commercial logistics. Warehouse closures and job cuts were then accelerated so that in his last annual report Firth could boast of cutting 2,000 jobs "two years ahead of schedule". Meanwhile, DSDA insiders report, Firth was busy "outsourcing" tasks that could have been done in-house and appointing interim managers on consultancy contracts rather than using civil servants, with Firth's old firm UPS itself brought in to give "strategy" advice. But job cuts and warehouse closures weren't the limit of his ambition. Even with these, he claimed, "we are reaching the limits of returns available from this business model". As one insider told the *Eye*, DSDA became "totally focused on profit".

To bolster returns Firth instigated a review to assess the potential for what he called "alternative governance routes", including "divestment of DSDA", ie full-scale privatisation, in which it is thought DSDA executives are likely to have wanted a stake, a la Qinetiq. The preferred programme is thought to have been to turn DSDA first into a "trading fund", then a separate company ripe for sale. The *Eye* understands the upheaval had been troubling military bosses for some time, and that last month they finally sent the fraud unit in.

The irony of the DSDA fiasco is that just four years ago, shortly before Firth's arrival, the agency won a competition to keep defence storage and distribution in-house. But this turned out to be no more than a prelude to putting profit before serving the military. Now a similar recipe is proposed for services including the Royal Mint, Ordnance Survey, the Land Registry and British Waterways – all in the name of "efficiency".

MILITARY TRAINING

Theatre of the absurd

IN AN otherwise critical report on the Ministry of Defence's "support to high intensity operations" (ie wars in Iraq and Afghanistan), the National Audit Office at least had some complimentary words for military training.

Before being posted to a particular theatre, troops are given specific training on how to deal with the conditions they are likely to meet and how to handle the equipment they will find there. Happily, the NAO noted: "For Iraq and Afghanistan, pre-deployment training is responsive to lessons identified in theatre and commanders are confident of its quality…". The only problems in fact were in supplying suitably adapted equipment for troops to train on before they were sent overseas.

The adaptability of military training to identified requirements in the field emerges partly because training is performed within the MoD by a mixture of civilian trainers and former military personnel. As armed forces minister Bob Ainsworth put it in parliament last week: "People who are about to be deployed into a changing situation, with changing threats, need to be brought up to date as completely as possible by those with the latest information. We, and the Army, Navy and Air Force, try to ensure that training is structured in such a way that all those lessons are learned to the maximum possible degree."

So what is the government proposing for such a critical task, currently performed to the satisfaction of military top brass? Flogging it off it, of course, under a long-delayed £12bn PFI deal that will see technical military training handed over to a joint venture between Qinetiq and Sodexho known as Metrix.

Whether the privatised technology company – whose staff last week voted overwhelmingly to strike over pay – and a French caterer, with help from pisspoor IT firm EDS and arms maker Raytheon, will prove as "responsive to lessons identified [by British forces] in theatre" is anyone's guess, though even the MoD isn't convinced. A year ago *Eye* 1213 published details of internal MoD papers confiding that there was a risk with the PFI deal that "trainees will leave the training establishment ill-prepared for service in operational commands". But the deal is going ahead anyway.

UN CORRUPTION

Blush with cash

THE United Nations' anti-corruption unit, the Procurement Task Force (PTF), has been busy since it was formed in 2006 trying to stamp out UN graft in the wake of the Iraqi oil-for-food scandal.

The PTF quickly turned its attention to Afghanistan and soon discovered endemic corruption. Its most recent investigation unearthed an expenses racket run by the man in charge of the UN Office for Project Services, Gary Helseth, that would make a British MP blush. A secret PTF report concludes: "At least $480,000 of UNOPS and donor funds was misappropriated by Mr. Helseth through the scheme… Mr Helseth routinely treated UNOPS and project money as his own personal bank account." Among his luxuries at the expense of funds meant for Afghan reconstruction were a $30,000 Lexus car, first class flights to Las Vegas, Florence and Dubai, a $20,000 kitchen out of cash earmarked for women's dormitories at Kabul university and $65,000 missing cash.

With millions of greenbacks swashing round the UN programme, the PTF is clearly needed more than ever. So what is the UN doing? It's closing it down, as member states including Russia and Singapore refuse to stump up to fund a unit that has fingered some of their people too. It will now be left to individual countries to deal with their own miscreants, spelling the end of any serious attempt to clean up the UN after just three years.

NHS IT

Granger than fiction?

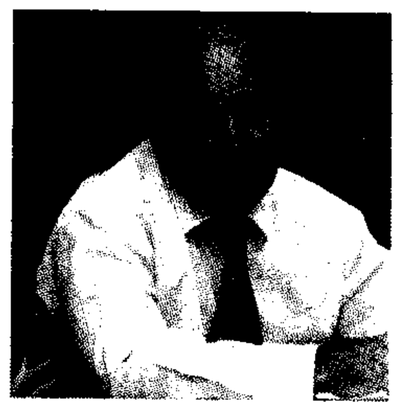
THE mystery over the movements of former NHS computer boss Richard Granger (see *Eye* 1236) deepens.

When Granger resigned as head of the NHS's disastrous £12.7bn national programme for IT in January last year – after awarding billions of pounds worth of contracts to a handful of IT suppliers – he became a freelance consultant. But has he been cashing in on his role by taking work from the firms to which he directed so much taxpayer cash?

In April the *Eye* heard that Granger was involved with iSoft, the under-performing software company that he bailed out for scores of millions and which is now owned by Autralian company IBA. But when the *Eye's* hack approached the company, Granger's lawyers, Schillings, swiftly threatened that printing anything could infringe Granger's privacy. We referred Schillings to the case of Arkell v. Pressdram (1971).

IBA, meanwhile, admitted that Granger had been a speaker at conferences as its guest but claimed that "he is not a paid consultant to IBA". A helpful reader points out that this was slightly misleading, claiming that Granger *has* worked for IBA/iSoft. When this was put to the company, a spokesman would only say: "We have nothing further to add."

When he left the public payroll, Granger (*below*) was barred by the government's advisory committee on public affairs from working for the programmes' original main contractors, including BT, CSC, Fujitsu and Accenture, for a year. He was also told he would have to ask permission if he worked in the same period for one of the "principal sub-contractors", of which iSoft was certainly one. The committee confirms he did not ask for such permission, while IBA refused to say when he worked for the company.



Just how well iSoft did from its dealings with the NHS IT programme became clear when IBA chief executive Gary Cohen recently revealed that the software being developed (at a glacial pace) for the NHS , Lorenzo, will be used by his firm around the world.

He can make this boast because under the NHS contract his company retains the "intellectual property" associated with Lorenzo, making the health service beholden to his firm. This was just the situation that landed the Inland Revenue in trouble over one of its botched IT systems, NIRS2, a few years ago. When it eventually wanted to sack the IT company in that case, Accenture, it had to pay £14m to buy the rights to the software – and even then it had to re-employ the firm to explain how it worked – to much criticism all round.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

13 Cases of swine flu confirmed in UK in one week in May, resulting in 41 front-page reports

313 Cases of swine flu confirmed in UK in one week in June, resulting in one front-page report

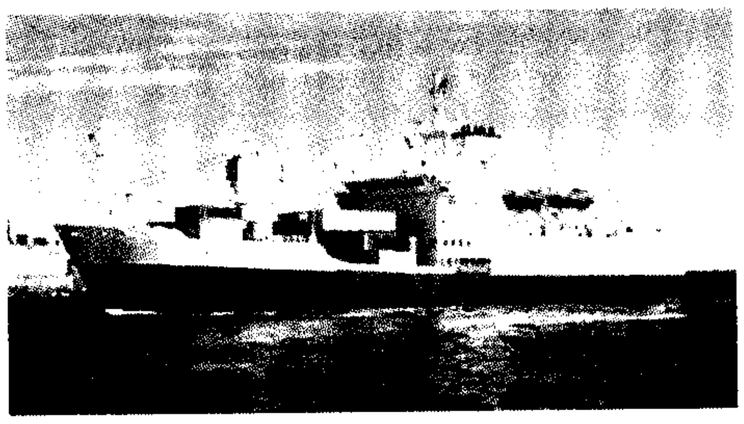
ST HELENA AIRPORT

Sceptic isle

AFTER plans for an airport connecting the remote British overseas territory of St Helena to the rest of the world (*Eye* 1227) were put on hold, the Department for International Development (DfID) has launched a consultation to persuade islanders to accept the alternative option of... doing nothing.

The document offers three options: going ahead with the airport (which it suggests is unlikely as "the government must consider whether this is the best use of scarce public finances"); commissioning a new ship to replace the RMS St Helena, the knackered and infrequent mail boat (*see above*) that for now is the only way to reach the South Atlantic island (pop. 4,000); or deferring any decision for five years. DfID says this last plan, which would allow the airport case to be re-examined "when the conditions are right", is "the most appropriate choice".

After years of feasibility studies and expensive consultants' fees (*Eyes passim*), the airport plan was well advanced: contractors had been chosen and were visiting the island to assess the workforce and facilities. To abandon the scheme now would waste all that spending.



British MP Bob Russell, who has visited St Helena, has tabled an early-day motion blasting the consultation as a waste of public money, since the options for access were thoroughly examined in 2004 and the airport was the only option that would end the island's dependence on a £16m-a-year subsidy from the UK. In expectation of a big influx of visitors via the airport, islanders had already started to invest in and train for jobs in the tourist industry. Even with the new estimated cost of £300m (a huge hike from the £100m it was expected to cost in 2005) the airport would soon start paying for itself.

In a recent Westminster Hall debate, Russell accused the government of betraying the people of St Helena. "There is a sense of disbelief and outrage at the way in which events have unfolded," he said. "All evidence points to the fact that the airport would quickly transform the island from being a net recipient of aid to being self-sufficient within a decade."

LEGAL NEWS

Singh on song

AS REPORTED in the last *Eye*, a coalition of the great and good has launched a campaign against the libel law to defend science writer Simon Singh and attract signatures to a "law has no place in scientific disputes" petition.

Singh announced last week that he intended to go to the appeal court to challenge Mr Justice Eady's ruling in the legal action against him brought by the British Chiropractic Association. Eady said it was not enough for Singh to show that chiropractors could not treat asthma, colic and other infant illnesses; he had to prove that they were deliberately lying when they claimed to possess such healing powers.

When Singh (*right*) had written that chiropractors "happily promoted bogus treatments", the judge ruled that he meant that "they dishonestly presented" treatments "to a trusting and, in some respects perhaps, vulnerable public as having proven efficacy in the treatment of certain conditions or illnesses, when it is known that there is nothing to support such claims."

Singh says he meant nothing of the sort, and the anger the case against him is provoking in the scientific community is growing. Sense about Science, the pressure group which is organising the campaign, said in its launch statement: "Where medical claims to cure or treat do not appear to be supported by evidence, we should be able to criticise assertions robustly and the public should have access to these views. English libel law, though, can serve to punish this kind of scrutiny." It also said legal costs are so high that "few defendants can afford to make their case."

While Singh has written three international best sellers and can afford to fight for free speech, lawyers say he may waste his money because it would be difficult to persuade the appeal court to overturn a ruling of this kind.

The appeal judges face problems of their own, however. If they overturn Mr Justice Eady's ruling, they will make the demands that he should stop hearing freedom of speech cases grow. If they do not, the campaign by MPs of all parties to liberalise libel law and bring in American protections for free speech will grow, and threaten the ability of their fellow lawyers to make a fat living.

PRISONS

Quis custodiet...

ONE prison officer a day is found guilty of serious misconduct, ranging from falling asleep on the job and assaulting inmates to being drunk at work, breaching security and trafficking drugs, according to the Prison Service's own statistics.

Figures released under the freedom of information act reveal that 739 prison officers in England and Wales were found guilty of serious offences in just over two years.

Officers at Brixton Prison – the jail with the worst staff disciplinary record – committed 25 offences between January 2007 and March 2009. Six staff were dismissed for abusive behaviour towards fellow officers, being asleep on duty, assaulting prisoners, theft and trafficking. Other offences – which resulted in official warnings – included abusive behaviour towards prisoners, improper relations with inmates, absence without leave, breaches of security and failure to obey instructions. Already this year, one officer has been warned for being asleep on duty and another for breaching security.

Onley Prison, a category C jail near Rugby, has the second worst record, with 22 offences. Two of its officers have been dismissed for improper relations with prisoners, four have received official warnings over their own criminal convictions and four were warned over breaches of security. Other offences include absence without leave, making false statements, unfitness through drink or drugs and failure to obey instructions.

Even Prison Service headquarters is not immune from bad behaviour. Six staff there have received official warnings for unprofessional conduct, theft or fraud, failure to obey instructions and for being convicted of a criminal offence while employed by the service.

PUBS

Scraping the barrel with Mandy

COULD Britain's ailing pub trade be rescued by the unlikely figure of Peter Mandelson?

The intriguing prospect of Mandy (not a man often to be found propping up the bar with a pint of Old Peculier and a packet of pork scratchings) saving the nation's Dog and Ducks arises after the Commons business and enterprise select committee last month published a damning report into pubcos, the rapacious pub-owning property companies whose anti-competitive practices are helping pubs go out of business at the rate of 40 a week.

The committee, chaired by Tory MP Peter Luff, roundly condemned the way pubcos such as Enterprise Inns and Punch Taverns, which between them own some 15,000 pubs, strangle the life out of pubs through the imposition of the beer tie, whereby tenants are forced to pay up to 75p per pint more than the market rate, and by setting rents at unsustainable levels (see last *Eye*). No wonder pubs are closing when two-thirds of tenants, the select committee found, earn less than £15,000 a year – even on turnovers of more than £500,000.

The MPs recommended that the whole sorry business be referred to the Competition Commission – the Office of Fair Trading having failed to consider the matter properly before. The commission, with a wide-ranging remit from Mandelson, could demand disclosure of all sorts of sensitive information from the pubco cartel. You can almost hear the shredders starting up already!

The cartel is only lawful because of an opt-out from Article 81 of the European Treaty, which normally outlaws such anti-competitive scams. This exemption expires next year and if it's not renewed, it's closing time for the pubcos. Last time round, the EU considered that the beer tie in the UK could be exempted because it didn't entirely close the market for beer and because the pubco model offered "benefits" to tied tenants that counterbalanced the excessive wholesale prices forced on publicans.

The MPs' report questioned those assumptions, saying that smaller brewers were effectively excluded from the market and that tied tenants were not on a level playing field with those who are free of the tie. The Commons report and further detailed criticism from the Competition Commission would probably seal the fate of the pubcos – and they know it.

The first reaction to the select committee report from Ted Tuppen, chief executive of Enterprise, was to claim that the MPs had got it all wrong. His next step was to order a satisfaction "survey" of tenants who were asked three leading questions, rather in the manner of the school bully quizzing kids in the playground.

The pubcos hope their ace is a letter from pubco supporter John Grogan, Labour MP for Selby and chair of the all-party parliamentary beer group, to pubco apologist Mike Benner, chief executive of Camra, the so-called Campaign for Real Ale. Grogan's letter called on Camra to use its status as a "super-complainant" under the Enterprise Act to demand an inquiry by the OFT. This sounds fine, until one realises it is supported by the pubcos. They think an OFT inquiry would head off a tougher inquiry by the Competition Commission and rubber-stamp the existing set-up for the foreseeable future. Trebles all round!

Camra's rank-and-file members are appalled. A "super-complaint" is only supposed to be used, in the interest of consumers, in the event that an inquiry would otherwise not happen. Camra admits in the current edition of its paper, *What's Brewing*, that the aim is to force the OFT to look into the pubcos first, in order to delay, and hopefully prevent, a more in-depth investigation.

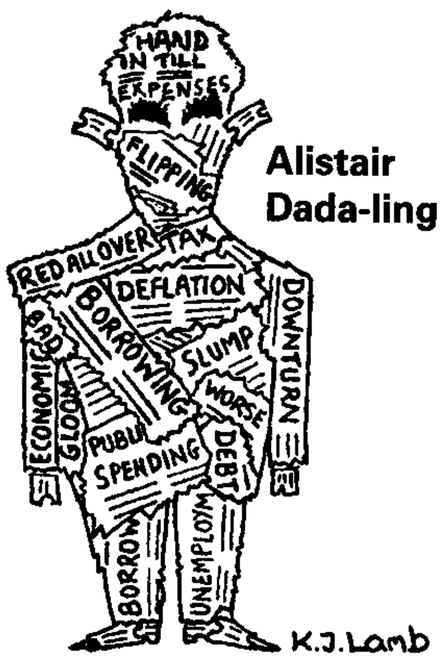
You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017 or email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk

In the City

FORMER cabinet minister Hazel Blears may feel that her capital gains tax problem has been made to go away by waving a cheque for £13,332 in front of the cameras – but tax experts are not so sure.

The media bought into Blears' spin that this magnanimous and unnecessary gesture – as it was all legal – reflected an end to the affair. But tax experts point out firstly that the cheque is an implicit admission that a previous tax return was wrong; and secondly that writing a cheque usually does not deal with such an admission as far as the taxman is concerned.

Blears made her capital gain on selling a London flat in August 2004, making a suggested gain of £45,000. That gain, if taxable, should have found its way on to her tax return for 2004-05, which would have been due and tax payable in January 2006. Except, of course, she did not pay any tax because she claimed the flat as her primary or main residence, which is CGT-free, although it was listed as her second home with the Commons' Fees Office. But, as pointed out in *Eye* 1236, the tax rules and definitions in the Green Book, which guides MPs' abuses/allowances, are mutually exclusive and can and do differ or contradict. Nor is it just MPs who can elect to nominate second homes as main homes and so avoid CGT in certain circumstances.



Alistair Dada-ling

As the Green Book allowed a second home also to be a main residence for CGT purposes, there was no liability and so no need to pay. So declaring "I have decided to send the Inland Revenue a cheque" is either an admission of making a false return, which is an offence, or simply a PR stunt. And if challenged, Blears would clearly deny making any false return.

But if the tax return that contained no reference to the gain was false or incomplete, that raises questions of whether penalties should be payable, plus interest on any tax due. These are matters that a taxpayer – even an MP – cannot decide unilaterally. The taxman would want to reopen the return and check all the details before coming to a decision as to what tax, if any, were payable. Therefore it is not possible simply to post a cheque to the taxman regarding a past year and say that's it.

The reality would be that any such cheque would initially be taken as an advance payment by Blears against any tax liability for non-salary income such as dividends or rents, either for the second instalment of the tax year 2007-8, due on 31 July, or against any similar tax liabilities or capital gains tax for 2008-9, which are not due until 31 January next year. And the way the HMRC computer works, if it detected a presumed over-payment as at 31 July it would return the cheque to Blears.

All this suggests that Blears' cheque is nothing more than a bid to buy back some respect from her Salford voters having heard and feared "absolutely the outrage and the anger that the public feel about what has been going on".

FORMER senior Scotland Yard fraud squad officers are puzzled and dismayed by the caution with which the Yard is approaching the MPs' expenses scandal. Their view is shared by former senior prosecutors from the Serious Farce Office.

The Met commissioner, Sir Paul Stephenson, has emphasised the discussions taking place with an assessment panel involving the Crown Prosecution Service. These discussions produced word last week that there would be few, if any prosecutions, and perhaps only if the Fees Office had been "deliberately misled".

The MPs who are particularly in the frame are those who claimed interest on non-existent mortgages, such as Labour's Elliot Morley, David Chaytor and Ben Chapman and Tory Bill Wiggin. The consensus view is that these payments could be prosecuted as fraud under the fraud act or as obtaining money by deception and false accounting under the theft act, or possibly under the common law offence of misconduct in public office.

The CPS guidelines, which define the principles of misconduct in public office, include a public officer acting as such; wilfully neglects to perform his duty and/or wilfully misconducts himself; without reasonable excuse or justification.

Whether this offence can apply to MPs is unclear. But when the appeal court was asked who a public officer was, it stated that the definition: "requires that… there must be a breach of duty by the officer, [which is wilful and which is such that the conduct is] an affront to the standing of the public office held. The threshold is a high one requiring conduct so far below acceptable standards as to amount to an abuse of the public's trust in the office holder". And "those who hold public office carry out their duties for the benefit of the public as a whole and, if they abuse their office, there is a breach of the public's trust". Sounds like it might fit?

More than 25 misconduct prosecutions have been brought since 2004 – several recently against Scotland Yard detectives for abusing expenses and making false claims. One was given a suspended jail sentence last year after pleading guilty to misusing his credit card by just under £10,000. The charge has also been used against local councillors and officials.

Lawyers point to the large number of housing and council tax benefit fraud cases brought every year under which claimants are prosecuted – very often for smaller sums than those claimed and paid to Morley (£16,000), Chapman (£15,000), Chaytor (£13,000) and Wiggin (£11,000). Local councils throughout Britain – including in the four MPs' constituencies – regularly prosecute for false claims of more than £2,000 and obtain community service orders or suspended jail sentences. Large claims above £20,000 usually result in a prison term.

In North Lincolnshire the local council prosecuted more than 25 cases in one year for amounts as little as £2,400. Doubtless local MP Morley was all in favour of the council "cracking down on those claiming money dishonestly".

The sentencing guidelines for benefit fraud state, in the words of the then Lord Chief Justice Lord Lane: "These offences involved the dishonest abstraction of honest taxpayers' money, and were not to be treated lightly." The suggested sentence for a conviction after a contested trial over an amount under £20,000 is nine to 12 months.

In certain cases the courts have decided that deterrent sentences were in order. UKIP MEP Ashley Mote was jailed for nine months in 2007 for falsely claiming more than £65,000 in benefits. So politicians are not immune from prosecution.

Experienced fraud investigators and prosecutors suggest that given the admissions made by Morley and Chaytor of their "mistake" and "unforgivable errors in accounting procedures" and repayment of the amounts overpaid, there should be no delay in launching an investigation, which is a matter for the commissioner, not the CPS. Obtaining the original documents and statements from Fees Office officials would be the next step before interviewing the suspects. In the case of Morley there would appear to be clear evidence that he did mislead the Fees Office when it asked for evidence of his mortgage – he provided copies of bank statements showing payments into a deposit account. Also, the claims for ghost interest payments were over a long period – 18 months (Morley) and almost a year (Chaytor). Too long to be explained by amnesia or bad book-keeping.

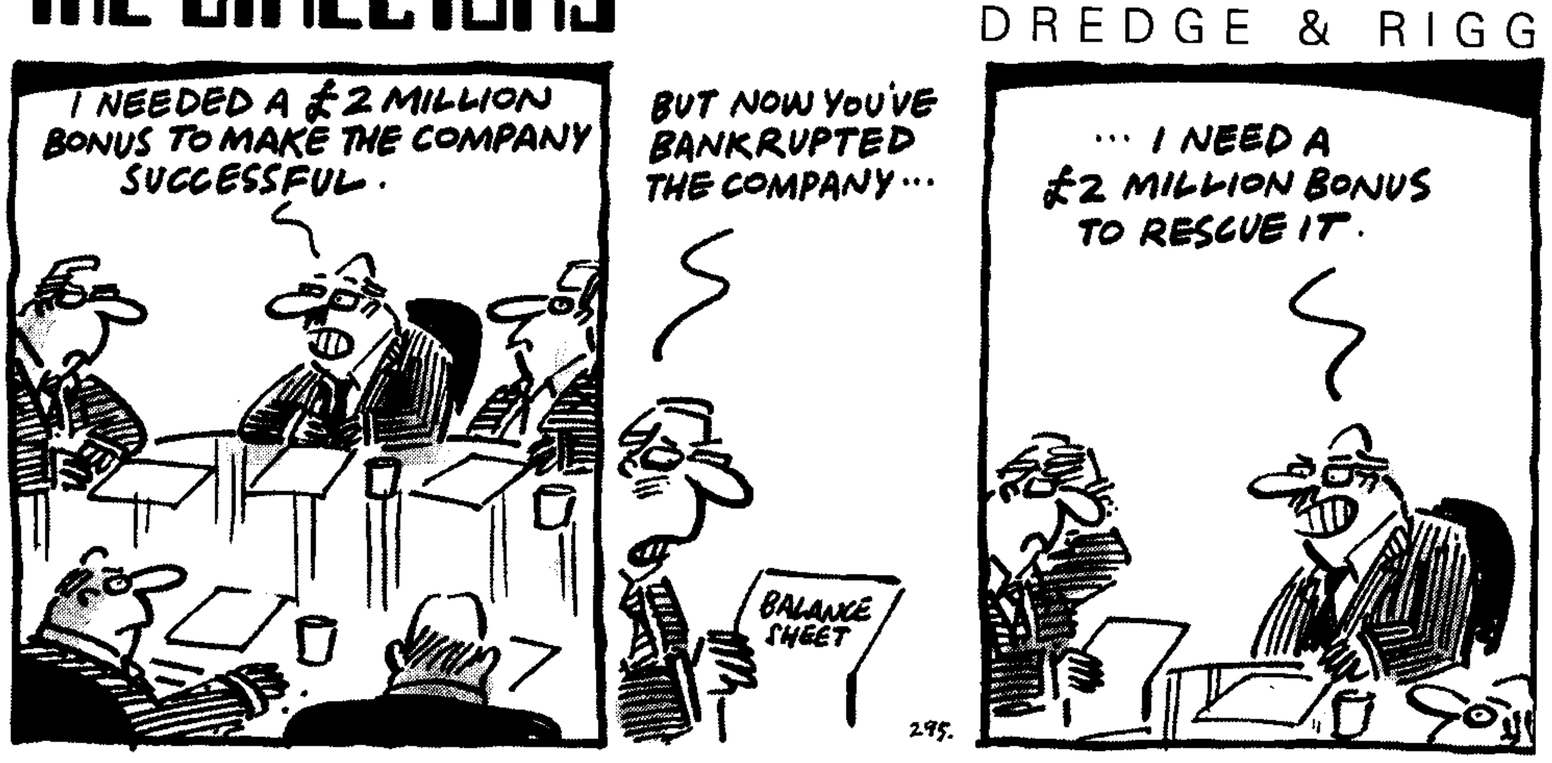
They accept that with Chapman there could be issues as to whether he could plead – as he does – that the Fees Office allowed him to carry on claiming a higher amount after paying off part of his mortgage. The complicity of the Fees Office could be a major problem in any prosecution and probably explains why the Yard is being so cautious. If the "custom and practice" was to nod through phantom or overpayments by MPs, this would make a prosecution high risk.

In Wiggin's case, there is the added complication that he was legitimately able to claim the interest on his London home – it appears that he consistently claimed on the wrong (country) home for almost two years, so there seems no added gain.

The issue for the police and the CPS is whether they have the will to take on MPs like Morley and Chaytor after the embarrassments of the failed "cash for honours" and Damien Green investigations. Adding to any gun-shy reactions are the complications presented by the role of the Fees Office, which may not want to be exposed as incompetent or worse, and the vague or ambiguous Green Book rules, which, like the similar House of Lords rules, ruled out any prosecution of Tory MP Derek Conway or the now suspended Lords Taylor and Truscott.

Then there will be the arguments that Morley and Chaytor are finished and their reputations trashed, so why punish them any further. The answer to that, say both former prosecutors and police officers, is public policy – that those who can buy their way out of court should not be allowed to do so.

The Department for Work and Pensions prosecuted more than 6,500 cases of benefit fraud in 2007 and, says HMRC, "use criminal sanctions regularly as their preferred option to counter benefit fraud". Those accused of benefit fraud rarely have salaries of more than £60,000 a year which they are trying to boost with tax-free allowances.


THE DIRECTORS
I NEEDED A £2 MILLION BONUS TO MAKE THE COMPANY SUCCESSFUL.
BUT NOW YOU'VE BANKRUPTED THE COMPANY…
BALANCE SHEET
295.
DREDGE & RIGG
… I NEED A £2 MILLION BONUS TO RESCUE IT.

SERIAL failed promoter Peter Abbey, the man who partnered Lord Seb Coe in his Complete Leisure Group and raised £1m for it in 2006, has run into a little local difficulty with the taxman, who is seeking to make him bankrupt.

HMRC filed a petition against Abbey last September – it is believed to be claiming around £140,000. The hearing to obtain a bankruptcy order was adjourned last week until 13 August. Abbey has been bankrupt before – in 1985, discharged in 1989. He was also the subject of an individual voluntary arrangement over debts of more than £500,000 in 1994.

This move by the taxman appears to have followed the company voluntary arrangement agreed by the creditors of Abbey's company, Berkeley Company Management (UK), last September. Creditors, including Abbey-linked companies with the largest claims, are owed £734,000, with HMRC in for £37,000. The non-Abbey creditors are owed around £200,000. The CVA provides for a (no doubt small) partial repayment over up to 66 months as an alternative to liquidation.

THERE was much Branson hoopla last month when the bearded wonder announced that while other airlines, such as the hated British Airways, were massively in the red – BA had announced a £401m loss the previous week – Virgin Atlantic had produced almost doubled profits for the difficult year to last February – up from £34.8m to £68.4m pre-tax.

These figures, however, were contained in a press release without the actual accounts. Virgin's great success was largely unquestioned in the financial pages and by the BBC. The *Financial Times* expressed some skepticism, referring to the different picture suggested in the accounts of Virgin Atlantic's minority shareholder Singapore Airlines to end March.

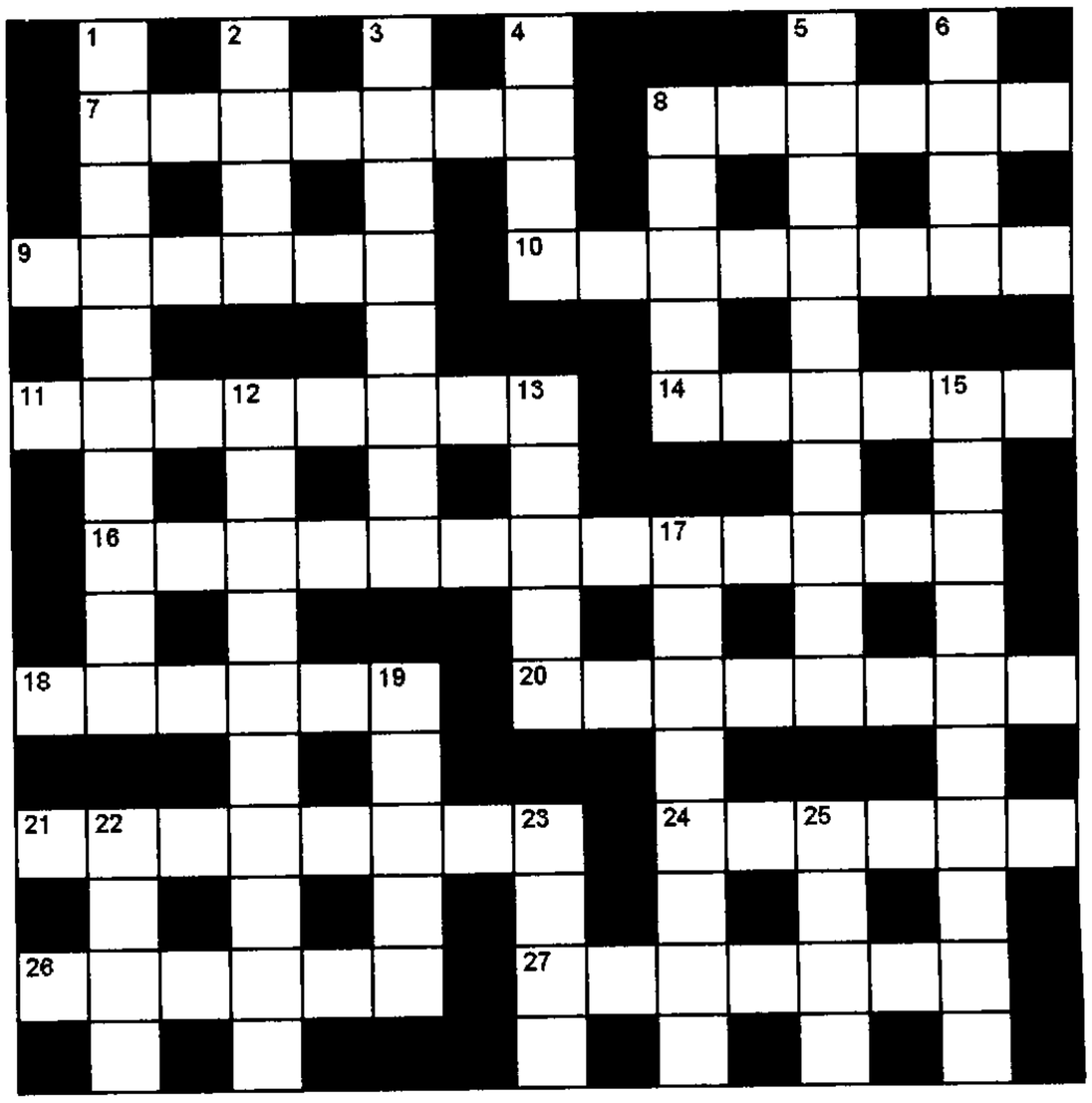
Strangely, these profit figures also do not match with the actual Virgin Atlantic Airlines accounts filed at Companies House days before the press release. These accounts show results somewhat less flattering and more in keeping with those of Virgin's airline rivals, if still better. VAA's operating profit was just £6.4m – admittedly compared with a 2007-08 loss of £5.9m. Pre-tax profits were indeed well ahead, at £49.8m compared with just £6m, but that figure was boosted by a £15m profit from the disposal of fixed assets (presumably aircraft), against a small loss in 2007-08. More significantly, the profit figure was lifted by £43m of interest and similar income, ie not from flying passengers. Those two combined items more than added up to the declared pre-tax profit which was arrived at after deducting interest payable to banks.

So where did these other numbers come from? The results for VAA's immediate parent Virgin Atlantic Ltd, which also includes the holiday and other Virgin travel operations. But those tell a similar tale. Operating profits turned round from a loss to £26m, but the pre-tax figure was still boosted by the same profits on asset sales and interest income. But what are a few millions and accountancy treatments when it comes to bragging rights? Perhaps credulous hacks should be a little wary of accepting claims for company results that come with no full accounts attached.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 393

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 19 June 2009

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

7 A lot of bitterness against pole dancing cover (7)

8 Bad-mouth Slim (6)

9/16 As broken up by dominant police brutes, justice ultimately lacking? (6,13)

10 Purity boobs, backing into yachtsman (8)

11 An unconventional atrocity (3,5)

14 Prize the end of Jeremy Thorpe, maybe? No way (6)

16 See 9ac.

18 Football smack-artist by the sound of it (6)

20 Burst into laughter: Clegg's introduction has gone and accumulated points! (6,2)

21 "Prison child's play with no aggravation": US department (8)

24 What Brown wants to be with the electorate (being non-U): "a tall tree" (6)

26 Being involved with frottage is terribly unfair to oldies (6)

27 Enlarge bust, as often seen in 21 (7)

DOWN

1 Don't sit on your arse and quit life! (3-2-3-2)

2 On getting an erection, be dirty (4)

3 Woody has change of political allegiance when a choice is to be made (8)

4 Goody-goody found in the City area? A fable! (4)

5 Supposed guardians of the peace sticking one in balls – humourless, lousy things (4,6)

6 Scumbag's second success (4)

8 Hardly satisfying read, *Telegraph*'s leader (5)

12 Yobs possibly making stand-ups experience drugs (5,5)

13 In the grip of dysentery? Join the competition! (5)

15 See 19dn.

17 Crown is in the possession of one single mobster (2,6)

19/15 What to call ministers of a certain political persuasion *not* involved in sleaze, etc? (5,10)

22 Balls, possibly on heartless homosexual, strung up (4)

23 Close to clipping wings of lady's man (4)

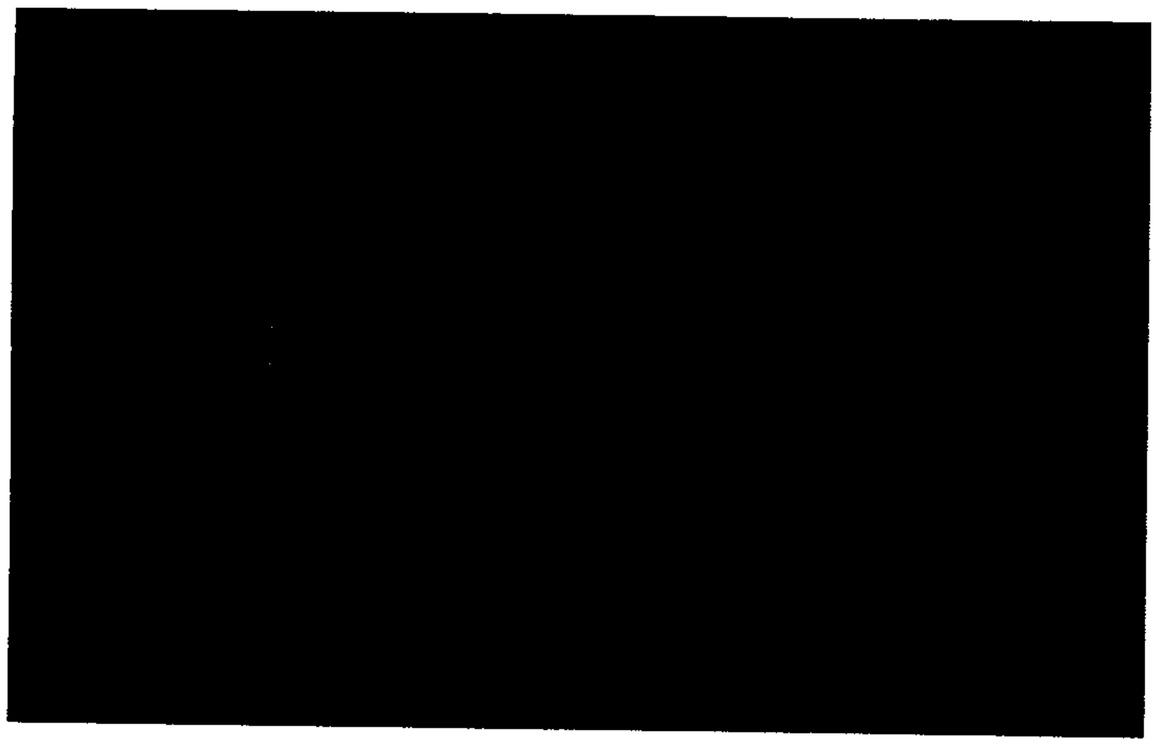
25 Broadcast piece's filth (4)

Crossword 392 winner: BOB HOLLAND

ACROSS: 6 Dow Jones 8 Unrest 10 Hairdo 11 Regrade 13 Derogatory 15/17/23 No more mister nice guy 20 Down and out 22 Acts 25 Rumble 26 Briefs 27 Satanist.

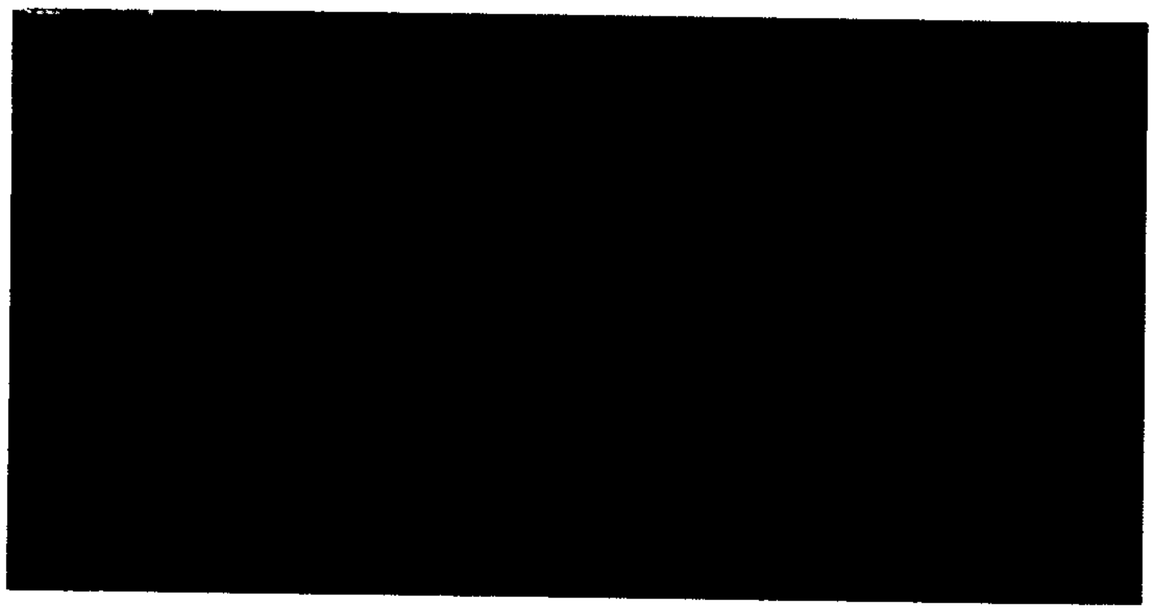
DOWN: 1 Coq au vin 2 Any Old Iron 3 Usurers 4/12 Hung over 5 Great tit 7 Juror 9 Smear 14 Glitterati 16 Manacles 18 Ruthless 19 Toryism 21 Owner 22 Admen 24 Gosh.

HUSBAND



Michelle Elwell will be opening her studio to the public as part of the Harrow Open Studios Event from 13th - 15th of June

For more information visit ***www.harrowopenstudios.com*** and ***www.printersfingers.com***



THE PAUL FOOT AWARD 2009

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Paul Foot, February 2003

For the fourth year running *Private Eye* and *The Guardian* are awarding a prize for investigative/ campaigning journalism in memory of Paul Foot.

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FOR FULL DETAILS AND ENTRY FORM VISIT

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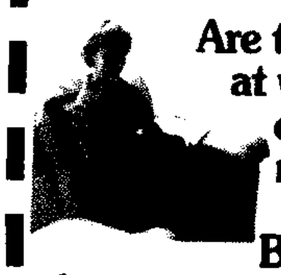
THE CLOSING DATE FOR ENTRIES IS 1st SEPTEMBER 2009

DOES SITTING MAKE YOUR BACK ACHE?



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The Daily Drinker

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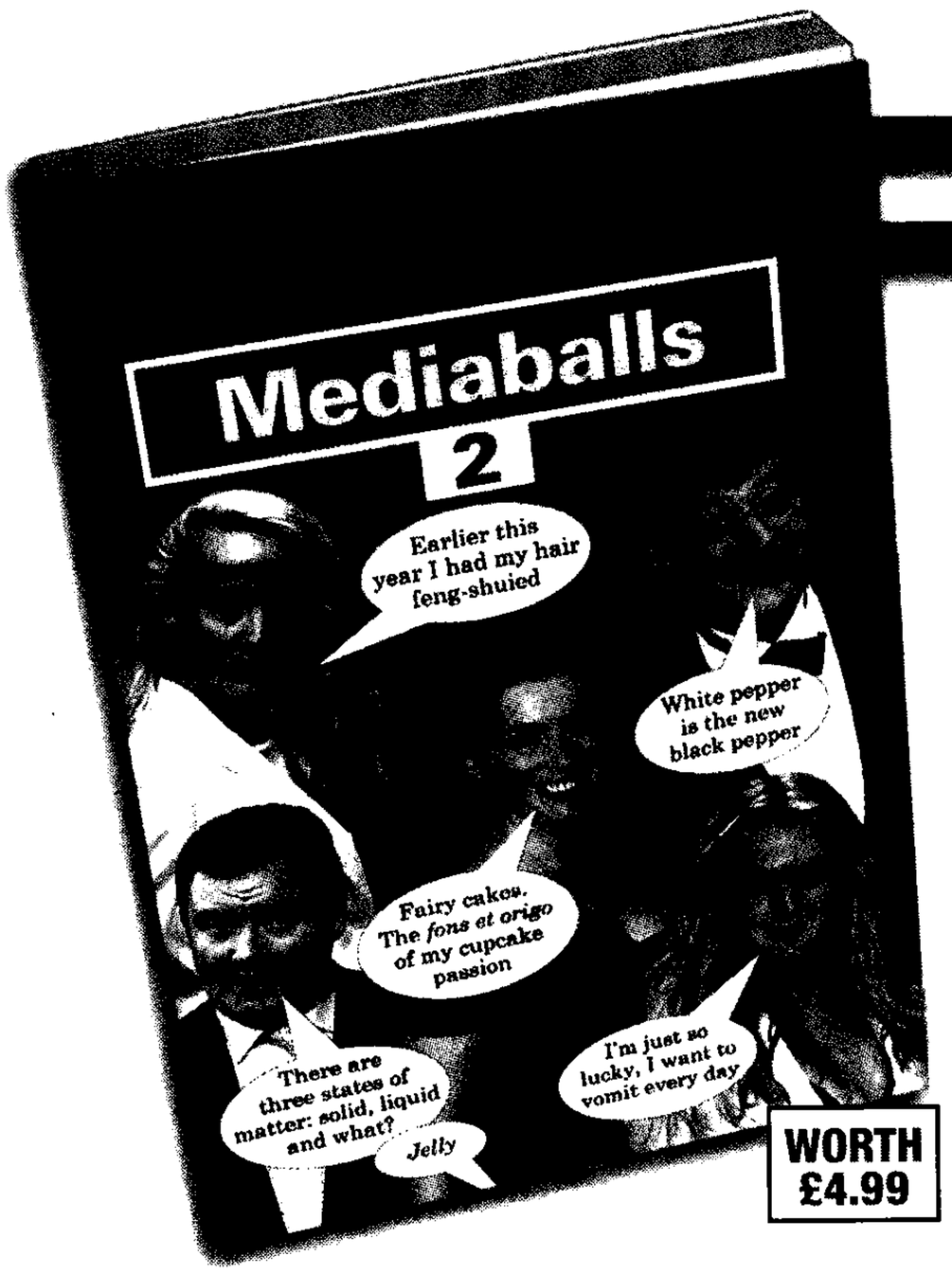
Mediaballs
2
Earlier this year I had my hair feng-shuied
White pepper is the new black pepper
Fairy cakes. The fons et origo of my cupcake passion
There are three states of matter: solid, liquid and what?
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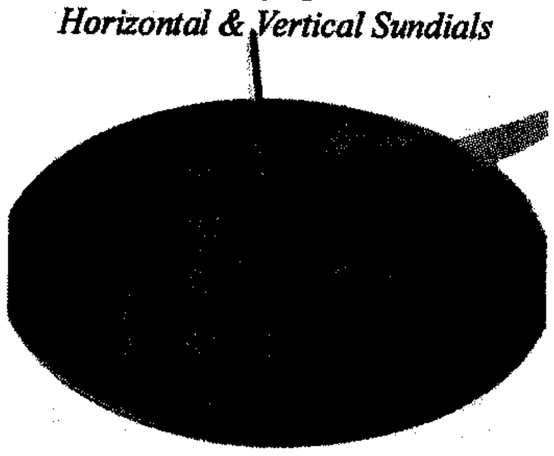

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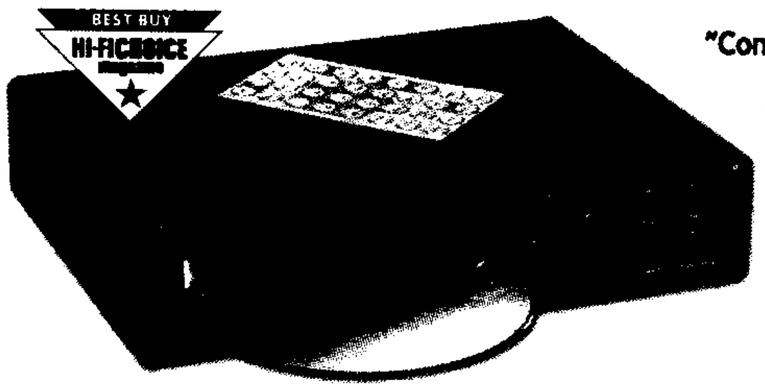

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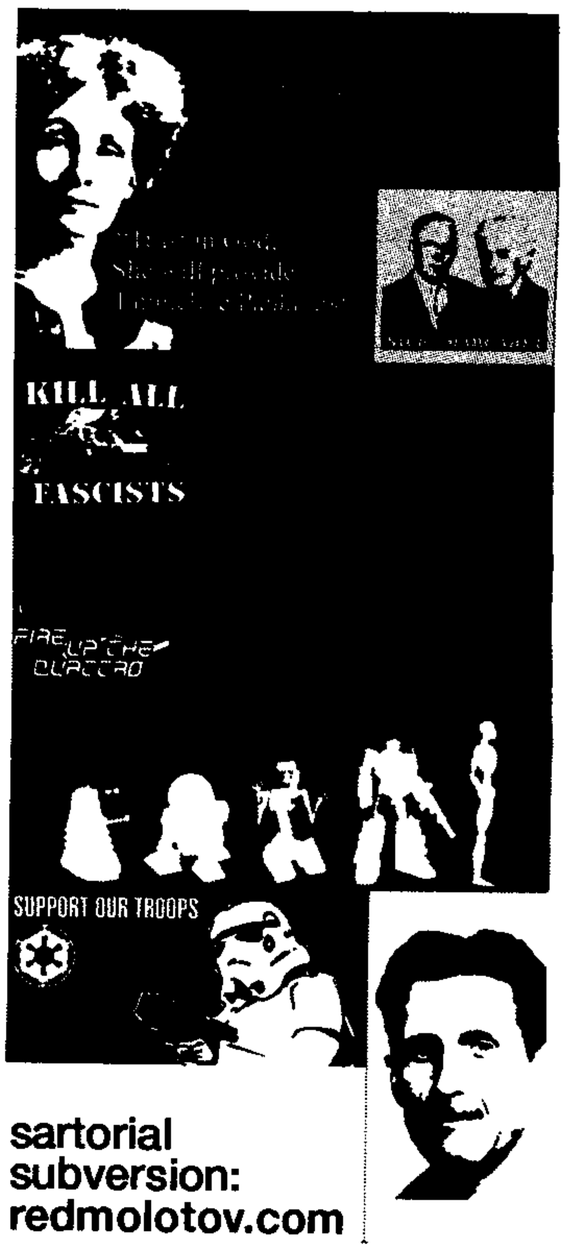

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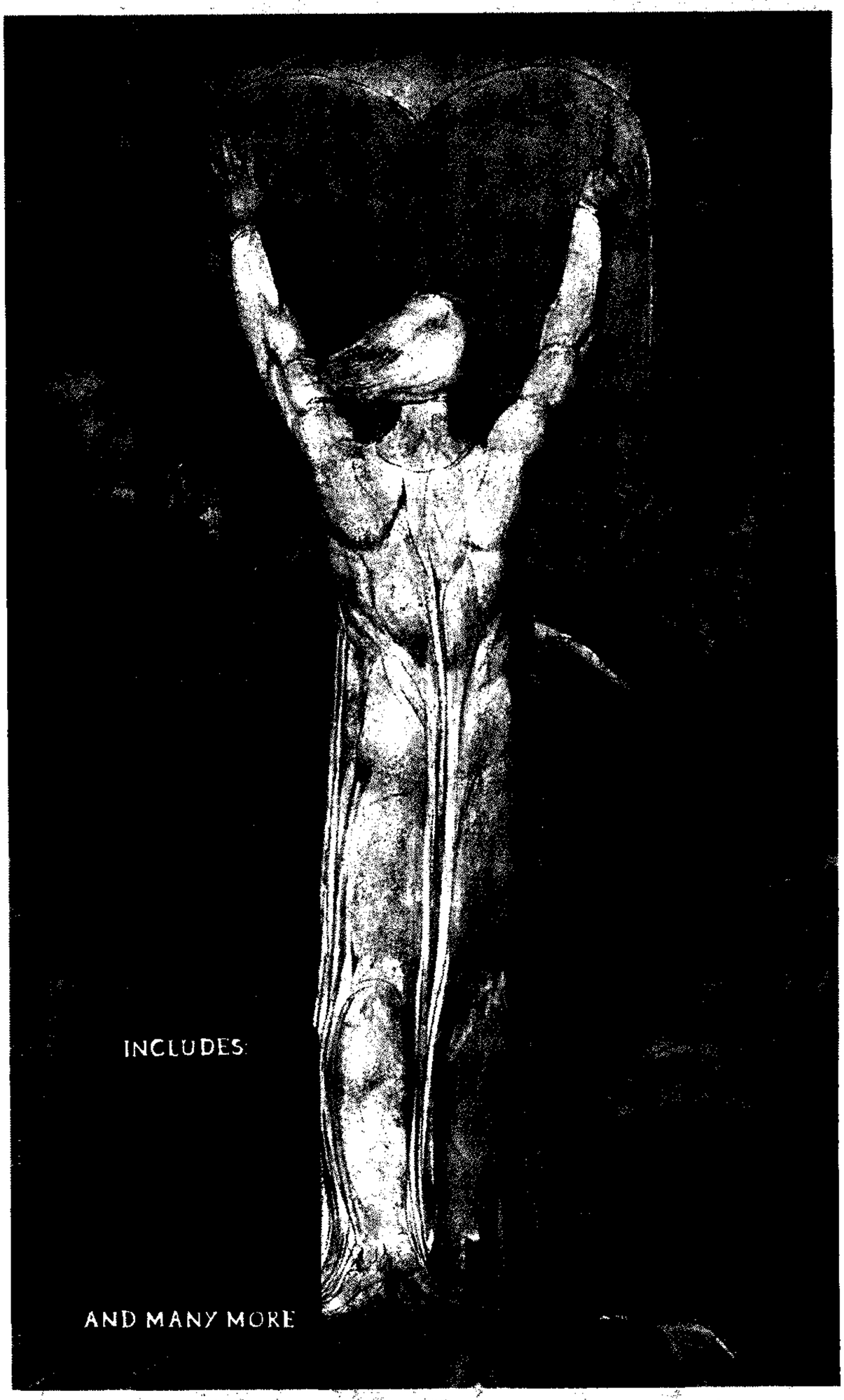

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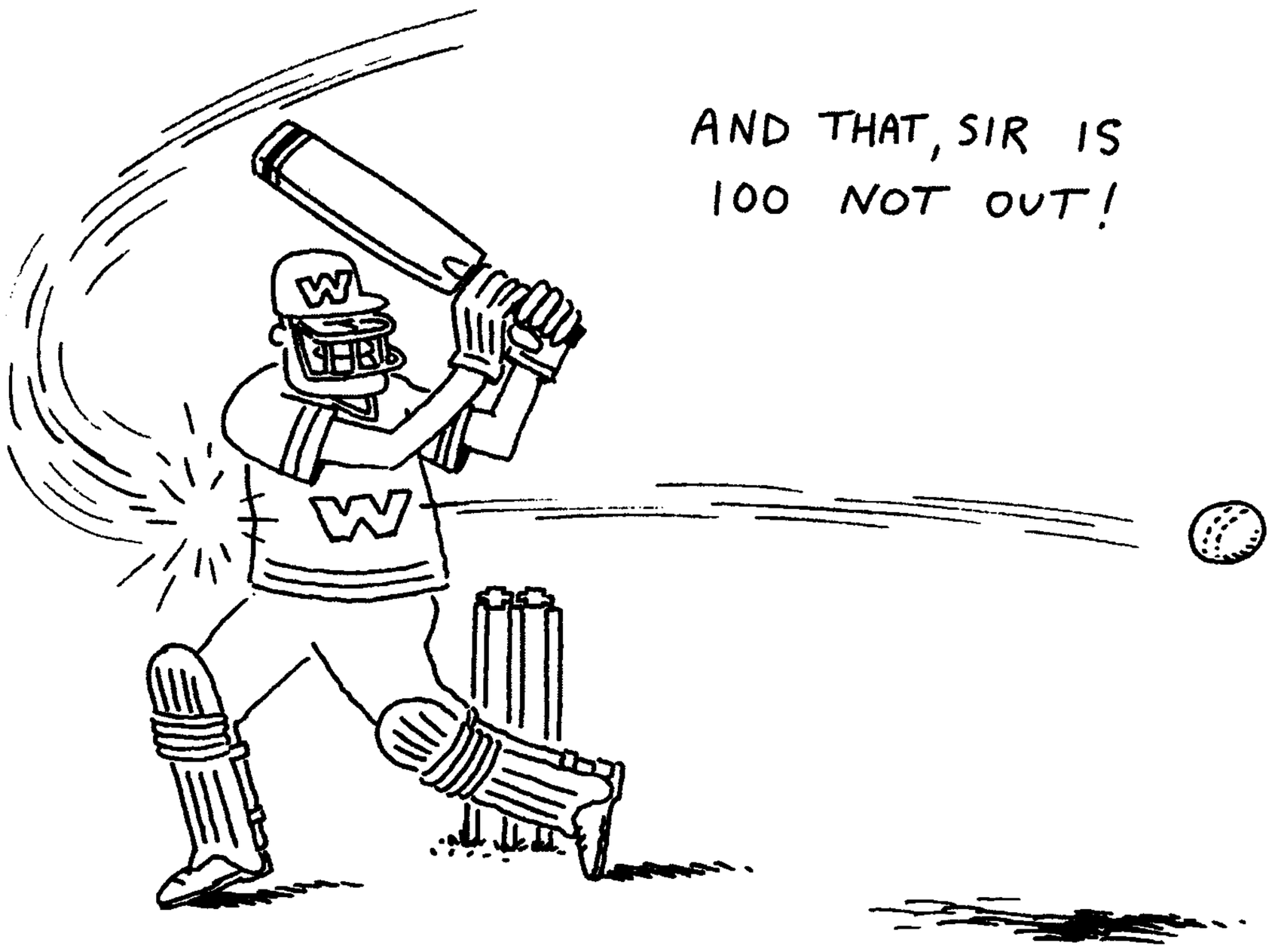

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